

BELIEF & PRACTICE IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

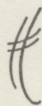


**BELIEF &
PRACTICE**
in the

**ORTHODOX
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by the Very Reverend
EUSEBIUS STEPHANOU

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INTRODUCTION

It is with pleasure that I introduce to you the "Belief and Practice in the Orthodox Church," a manual and guide to Orthodox life, which Father Stephanou, one of the most learned and enlightened ordained theologians of our Church, has prepared for all Orthodox believers.

In reality I am not introducing the book to you, but you to the book; for it is not merely a publication, but the living and genuine expression of the Orthodox belief and practice as conceived and lived by a young American-born Greek Orthodox clergyman who laboriously searched for the belief and practice that should be experienced and practiced by an Orthodox born in this land.

Orthodoxy is a system of beliefs that should inspire our practices; of practices that should portray our beliefs. Orthodoxy should neither be identified with an ancient or with a modern Church. It is the never waning brilliance of that Star, which appeared in Bethlehem to guide the wandering shepherds and the magi of all times to Him, Who is the Light, the Life and the Truth.

The beliefs and practices of the Orthodox as expounded in this book may well mold and shape your personal piety and religious experience, for unless we become fully conscious and convinced, our beliefs and practices will continue to be void of any real meaning, value or usefulness.

The young Orthodox generations, living as they do in a most pluralistic society, need both: a mark of identity and the essentials of a separate entity. "Belief and Practice in the Orthodox Church" may provide the youth with both. It can furthermore accord it an ever-glowing spirit and heart to see Orthodoxy not as a major faith, but as a major factor in the making of our family and society, as well as in the final development of an Orthodox ethos, behavior and conduct.

It is in this hope and anticipation that I introduce to you the book of Father Eusebius, and you to its inspiring contents, praying and beseeching the Lord to ever shield and guard your souls and minds, and seal your hearts and lives with the beliefs that we must practice and the practices in which we must wholeheartedly believe and adhere.

With paternal love and blessings
THE MOST REVEREND ARCHBISHOP IAKOVOS
Primate of the Greek Orthodox Church of
North and South America

New York, August 1, 1965

PREFACE

History has accustomed the Holy Orthodox Church to crisis. Struggles for cultural survival are familiar experiences to her. In our nuclear age the spiritual and moral stamina of Western Civilization in its wider sphere faces the supreme test. The enemy that threatens is no longer from without, like the barbarian of old. The peril rises from within western culture, since Communism on that side of the iron curtain, as well as Secularism on this side, are both monstrous upshots of western thought.

Those who call themselves Orthodox Christians assume a grave responsibility in the sight of God and humanity. Those who are more richly blessed always have a greater account to give to divine judgment and to history. Orthodox are privileged to belong to the Mother Church of Christendom, certainly not by chance nor by accident. Their challenge is to recognize the manifest destiny which God's providence has appointed unto them. It is their obligation to seriously re-examine their relationship to the Church in which they have been baptized and to re-discover in her divine teachings and practices the vital power needed for individual and global survival. We live in an age of impending nuclear disaster when Orthodox Christians cannot afford the luxury of complacency and nominal Church membership.

Belief and Practice in the Orthodox Church is an addition to the growing number of publications in English on the Orthodox Faith. It is written in simple, concise language and with a relevance to the mentality of our native-born faithful who search for answers to the multitude of questions which they ask in their attempt to prove themselves believing and practicing members of the Holy Orthodox Church. The aim of this book is modest and does in no way purport to do the impossible, namely to exhaust a subject which is essentially inexhaustible. I respectfully acknowledge the paternal encouragement and blessings of His Eminence, Archbishop Iakovos, without which this contribution to our Archdiocesan publications would not have been possible.

THE VERY REVEREND EUSEBIUS A. STEPHANOU
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Notre Dame, Indiana
September 1, 1966

BELIEF AND PRACTICE IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

In today's technological world of swift changes and uncertainty man more than ever before needs the inner re-assurance which comes with faith in God. Only God remains unchanging and reliable. Man's deeper spirit has always found rest in the conviction that he is related to God Who is eternal. He has always revolted inwardly against the idea that he is simply part of the world of perpetual flux.

The Unchanging Fact in a Changing World

God is forever involved in man's search for what remains constant and stable. Our Creator's supreme expression of love for man was the fact that He became man that man might become God. In His only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, mankind finds the response to the need for eternal self-fulfillment. For the past two thousand years the Church, which He founded and left upon earth, remains as that unchanging reality in a rapidly changing world.

It is common to think of the Church as the edifice of brick and mortar used for worship. But in actuality the Church is an invisible, as well as a visible, structure and a living organization of souls and bodies. We can define the Church as a Temple of living people in which the Holy Spirit indwells in response to faith and obedience. It is a society, a community, and a fellowship made up of all those who have accepted Jesus Christ and who think and live in conformity to His Divine teachings.

The Bible speaks of the Church as the Body of Christ, because it is the reality of the abiding presence of Christ upon earth in both His human and Divine nature. Consisting of both clergy and laity, the Church is the Divine institution which Christ left in the world to carry out His work of salvation. The mission of the Church is to call men out of sin and despair into the holiness, the hope, and the

eternal joy which God grants richly through His only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. The Church, as the instrument of the Lord, proclaims the message of redemption to a world lying in the dark shadow of uncertainty and confusion.

The Church has four marks: She is one. Oneness is of the essence of the Church. The revealed word says: "There is one Body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling." The very purpose of the Church is to bring men into a perfect unity. The entry of sin into the world has set man against God and man against his fellow man. Disunity has torn humanity asunder, but it finds its deliverance in the power with which Christ has endowed His Church. By crushing the dominion of Satan, whose work is to destroy mankind through division and strife, Christ leads men into the only possible perfect unity through His one Church. Apart from His Church, there can be no hope for uniting humanity under God's sovereignty.

The Church is also holy, because her Founder, Jesus Christ, is holy. She bestows holiness upon her members through the all-Holy Spirit. Sin has poisoned the soul with impurity and corruption. Man dwells under the dominion of the corrupting and deteriorating bondage of evil and death. But the Church is the refuge for finding liberation from the disintegrating influence of Satan. The infusion of the quickening and sanctifying Spirit of God which was forfeited in the fall of our first parents is renewed in the Church. The fulness of the communion of the Holy Spirit is restored to man in the life of the Church.

The Church is also catholic, because she is universal either actually or potentially. The whole world belongs to her. The Church calls upon all men to accept the Gospel of Salvation—regardless of race and nationality. She reaches out to win souls to Christ and to redeem all men irrespective of color and ethnic origin. The supernatural power to transcend racial and national differences lies in the Church which constitutes the "people of God" and a "holy nation." The Church does not discriminate between "Jew and Greek." All are one in Christ Jesus. In obedience to her Head, she opens her doors to all people and seeks among all nations of the earth to bring human souls into the redeeming sphere of her historical life. It is

rather Orthodox Christians that belong to the historical Catholic Church—not members of the Roman Church.

The Church is also apostolic, because she was established by the Apostles of Christ. They were the first to receive the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Day and to be commissioned by their Divine Master to become His witnesses unto the uttermost parts of the earth. They set the foundation upon which the doctrinal and administrative aspects of the Church were to evolve and develop. The Apostles transmitted the authority to preach, to administer the sacraments, and to shepherd the Church to their immediate successors, Bishops and Priests. This three-fold authority of the Church's ministry which continues to this day stems from the Apostles. Apostolic succession consists of the unbroken continuity of ordinations, traceable to the Apostles, and of the purity of Apostolic doctrine.

Why do I belong to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, also known as the Orthodox Church? Because I know that she is the one and only Church that Christ founded and I firmly believe that it is in this Church that I will find my way to eternal salvation. I acknowledge that to be a member of the Church means to stand at the threshold of eternal life.

Certainty in Christ and His Church

Governed by the Holy Spirit, the Church has preserved the Faith unadulterated and unchanged in a constantly changing world. The revealed Truth is just as unchanging and eternal as God is in His nature. The Church, which is the Custodian of Divine revelation, represents the final authority in the areas of religion, ethics, and worship. It is inconsistent for an Orthodox Christian to belong to any outside organization which involves itself in these three sacred realms. There is only one fellowship and one club for a believing follower of Christ—the Church. To be true to Christ and to be a member of a secret society or lodge are incompatible from the Orthodox standpoint. Fellowship, brotherhood, and works of charity belong in the Church of Christ where they are fruits of regeneration.

The Church aims to unite men in a true unity and she alone

possesses the power to accomplish this end, because Divine power works in the life of the Church. Outside the Church there can be no real solidarity and brotherhood. All talk of brotherhood, charity, and equality is vain and futile insofar as it is carried on outside the framework of the Church. It is mere sentimentalism and rationalistic humanism. All moral values are rooted in faith in Jesus Christ. They can be fully realized only in the Church, since the Church furnishes the supernatural power that is required to transform human nature.

The secret of true brotherhood, solidarity, and unity lies in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist which Christ instituted for this purpose. It is centered in the common Cup and Bread sacramentally offered upon the Altar of Christ's Sacrifice, as we shall have occasion subsequently to mention again. The universally recognized human values and ideals are fulfilled only when man becomes united mystically with Christ Who is the inclusive representative of the new humanity, the New Adam, and the Head of the Church.

The invitation of Christ remains the call of His Holy Church: "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavily laden, and I will give you rest." Apart from Christ and His true Church there is only unrest and uncertainty. The human spirit finds rest and ultimate contentment only in Christ and the Holy Orthodox Church which He founded on Pentecost day. The deep spiritual thirst of the soul is quenched only by being refreshed by the clear, pristine waters which flow from the Holy Spirit whose abode is the Church. There is no substitute for Christ and His only true Church.

Falsely-called churches which have drifted away from the pure teachings of Christ cannot satisfy the profound longings of the soul. Churches that have separated from the Orthodox Church do not possess the fulness of the Holy Spirit and thus cannot grant complete regeneration and sanctification to the human soul. Christ warned us of rival churches that would exist side by side with His true Church. He cautioned against those who pervert His teachings and mislead people with their own human, private views.

We must remember that non-Orthodox religions and sects do possess a certain amount of truth. Falsehood is really a half truth. It never appears in the nude. It is always dressed in partial truth to

deceive more effectively and to mislead. Falsehood is a distorted truth.

It is the duty of every Orthodox Christian to be vigilant against false teachings and to protect the purity of the Faith. Good deeds do us no good if we are indifferent and complacent about correct doctrines. To cherish our Faith and to live as truly practicing members of Christ's Church is to possess unspeakable joy and to inherit glorious promises. We cannot take chances with the eternal fate of our soul. Winning the infinite blessedness in the Kingdom of God comes with obedience to the Crucified and Risen Christ and identification with His Holy Orthodox Church which He has purchased in His Precious Blood.

Authority in the Church

The Church is "the pillar and ground of the Truth." There may be bits of truth floating around outside the Church; but the fulness of the truth pertaining to God and His relationship to His creation is to be found only within the pale of the Church. The Church possesses Truth which is revealed from God in Jesus Christ. It is free from any admixture of error and man-made opinions. The Church is the repository of the Universal Truth which was disclosed in the Incarnation of the Son of God. It was left with the Church by Christ Who said, "I am the truth."

Clergy and laity, as individuals, can very well commit errors, but the Church, as a whole, can never err in matters of revealed truth. She is ultimately infallible. Christ is one with His Church which is His Body. Final authority lies with the Holy Spirit which, according to the promises of Christ, leads the Church in all truth. Since Pentecost day when the Holy Spirit descended and the Church was founded, it remained within the Church inhabiting it forever. Consequently, the Holy Spirit is the highest and final authority in the Church. The Church is unerring, because she manifests the power of the Holy Spirit in this regard.

The ultimate authority of the Holy Spirit, whether in doctrine

or discipline, expresses itself in the conscience of the Church or the ultimate common consensus of the faithful in the Church, clergy and laity. However, in a special way the totality of the Bishops serves to articulate the common mind of the Church on dogmatic and canonical questions. In turn, whenever the aggregate of the Episcopate becomes truly the instrument of the Holy Spirit, the council becomes known as an Ecumenical Council. Such a council defines with authoritative formulations the revealed truths that happen to be in question. These ecumenical formulations are binding on all Orthodox faithful upon penalty of excommunication. They do not prohibit or prevent further thought or development which can improve and perfect verbal articulation. Rather, they serve as sign posts and guiding standards in the further elaboration of revealed dogma.

Not only can the Church in her apologetical task progress by restating the unchanging verities of the Faith, but she must always be alive to new challenges around her. Techniques and methods are always subject to change and improvement.

In the interim between local or Ecumenical Councils the local Archbishop of a particular Church exercises supreme authority. He watches over the purity of the Faith and is the chief overseer of the discipline in his local Church. As the dispenser and holder of the fulness of priestly grace, he rightfully receives the respect and obedience of the Priests, Deacons, and laity within the local province of his Church. He discharges the responsibility of safeguarding the unity of the Church. The Episcopal dignity is the pivot around which Church unity is understood. It is for this reason that the Fathers of the Early Church affirmed that "Where the Bishop is there is the Church also." This patristic maxim has always been acceptable in the Orthodox Church. The Bishop is recognized as the "type of Christ" and to disregard the Bishop is to disregard Christ.

Thus, on the local level each Archbishop is responsible for preserving the Faith free from adulteration. This is the special gift that comes with ordination. St. Irenaeus, for example, says that the Bishops "have received the certain gift of truth according to the good pleasure of the Father." Each Archbishop in his own local Church guards the Faith against the intrusion of heresy. In the event he lapses into error, then the neighboring Archbishops are responsible for replacing him with an Archbishop who holds to Orthodox doc-

trine. In the case of Patriarchates, the Patriarch and His Holy Synod exercise such authority.

Scripture and Tradition

While the Holy Spirit is the source of all truth, Scripture (the Bible) and Tradition are the two channels through which the revealed truth is transmitted to the Church. Scripture is the verbal recording of divine revelation, while Tradition is the very experience of the Gospel in the corporate life of the Church. We read and we hear Scripture read to us, but Tradition represents a living activity of the Holy Spirit which can be apprehended within the sphere of rebirth. It is the "newness of life" experienced in our identity with the Body of Christ. Tradition cannot be understood and recognized in an objective approach, because it is a reality which is identified with the redeemed community of the faithful. The Church, the aggregate of clergy and laity, is a living organism where time and eternity meet; she preserves the Faith by being one with Christ and by being always inhabited by the Holy Spirit.

Inasmuch as Scripture came out of the life of the Church, it becomes obvious that Tradition and Scripture cannot be separated, least of all be set over against each other. Both belong to the life of the Church and they can never be isolated one from another. Each potentially provides the believer with the fulness of the revealed Truth, but the actuality of the plenitude of the Faith becomes realized in the combination of both.

Tradition can be understood as having a two-fold meaning, namely, a broad and a narrow one: the *outer tradition* and the *inner tradition*, respectively. Inner Tradition is Tradition, strictly speaking, as related to Scripture. It is the Church's corporate experience of redemption in unbroken, historical continuity from Pentecost to the present. Tradition is the actual living of the core of the Gospel, namely, that "Christ died, arose, and shall come again." It is kerygmatic and evangelical. The writings of the Holy Fathers, the formulations of the Councils, the Creeds, etc. do not, properly speaking,

constitute part of Tradition. These are rather written elaborations and explications of Tradition and Scripture. Tradition is not so much the act and process of delivering or handing down the Gospel, as it is the Faith itself as proclaimed by the Apostles, as lived by the historical Church, and handed down from one generation to another.

By *Outer Tradition* we mean the accumulative development of the external forms and expressions that worship and the general discipline in the life of the Church have taken in the process of time. Liturgical practices, usages, forms, customs, etc., all belong to the outer tradition of the Church. While *outer tradition*, embracing the external expressions of the life of the Church, is liable to varying changes in the sense of growth and evolution from one period to another, *inner tradition* remains unchanging through history from one generation to another. The Holy Fathers of the Church, for example, enriched the *outer tradition* by bequeathing to the Church their monumental writings in which they defined and expounded the doctrines contained in Tradition and Scripture. The patristic writings, like the conciliar definitions comprise the articulation of the *inner tradition*. They represent the stages of the verbalizing of what the Church possesses "in a mystery."

The Faith in the beginning was not committed to a book, but rather to the community of the faithful who received it and handed it down to others. It was not by means of a written document that the Faith was first proclaimed. The three thousand at Pentecost accepted Christ because of St. Peter's oral preaching. Tradition is, of course, the oral preaching of the Gospel, but it is principally the existential apprehension of the Gospel in the communal life of the Church. The message of salvation was heard and the power of the Spirit was seen, not read by those who believed. "And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?"

Scripture is the recording of what was already proclaimed and already accepted by the Church. It reminds us of what already has been declared by the Church and accepted. Scripture comes after Tradition in chronological sequence. The Holy Spirit moved the authors of the New Testament some time after Pentecost. The Church was a reality before any Scripture and appeared as an authoritative document. The Church was founded by the living word of the Gos-

pel preached by St. Peter after the descent of the Holy Spirit empowered him to understand the mystery of redemption. For several decades the Church was an ongoing concern without acknowledging any of the New Testament writings as authority in matters of the Faith.

Scripture and the Church

Scripture originates from the life of the Church, namely Tradition. Out of Tradition came the recorded proclamation of the Gospel. The Church is the matrix of Scripture and it is the Church that gave birth to Scripture. Pentecost is not a day of recording or reading, but the event of declaring forth by word of mouth the Gospel and the day of experiencing regeneration in the sacramental life of the Church. Tradition is the common experience of redemption and sanctification of those who have been united in the Body of Christ. It is the *communis sensus* of the Church in her experience of redemption in Christ in an unbroken historical continuity. Scripture is recorded Tradition (*tradition scripta*). By inspiration of the Holy Spirit they put down in writing what the Church had already accepted and had already been proclaiming to the world.

Scripture itself testifies that it is not self-contained nor independent. St. Paul urges the brethren "to stand fast and hold the traditions which have been taught, whether by word or by epistle." St. Peter cautions that Scriptural reading unaided by Tradition can lead to self-delusion. "As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable distort, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." By restricting oneself to the letter of Scripture, the very opposite of redemption can be the result. "The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life." The Spirit manifested to the individual believer in the corporate and sacramental life of the Church. The affirmation of the revealed truth is not a private attainment. The individual finds certainty in the *communis sensus fidelium*.

Since the Church is the matrix of Scripture, she is also the autho-

ritative custodian and interpreter of what Scripture contains. It is within the framework of the Church that Scripture leads to salvation. When torn from the context of the Church's life, Scripture ceases to offer spiritual benefit. The Church determined the canon of Scripture, because she possessed the living Tradition rising from Apostolic times, and, on the basis of Tradition, she decided what books belong to Scripture, as inspired writings, and which did not. The continuum of her redeeming life was the final judge as to what was Scripture and what was not Scripture.

Tradition, as the authoritative determinant of the Faith, is not merely the vague and ambiguous life of the Church. It is the corporate liturgical experience of spiritual renewal attained in the Holy Eucharist and preserved in an unbroken continuity from one generation to another. In the Divine Liturgy the Church renews her identity with Christ and all believers renew their "newness of life" by living and re-living the passion and glorious resurrection of the Lord. The Eucharist is the affirmation of the Gospel of Resurrection and Redemption preached to the unredeemed by those already within the sphere of salvation.

Thus Scripture and Tradition are interwoven in the life of the Church. It is not only read at the Divine Liturgy for edification and in private, but it becomes an empirical reality in Eucharistic worship. The acts of Redemption are re-enacted and re-experienced. We are renewed in the mystery of salvation which is contained in the Scripture as the *kerygma*. Consequently, Tradition must always be viewed as a reality rooted in the Eucharistic life of the Church, or the *koinonia*.

Unbroken continuity of the *koinonia* since the Apostles is the safeguard and guarantee of authentic Tradition. The Orthodox Church teaches that this continuity has been lost by the departure of those outside of her pale from the Faith and Polity of the true Church. The *koinonia* was lost in the West when Rome drifted into error and, consequently, along with it the authentic Tradition which springs from the *koinonia*. The *koinonia* or corporate experience cannot be grasped only in personal faith and individual commitment, nor necessarily by tactual succession of ordinations of Apostolic origin. It must have the character of historical continuity which secures the identity of the experience of the unadulterated

Faith in Christ between all ages as well as the consciousness of oneness.

The Orthodox Church affirms emphatically that all efforts for Church unity, however earnest and prayerful, are futile and will end inevitably in failure, unless the Tradition of the early Undivided Church is regained. It is only in the authentic Tradition of the historical Church that Scripture becomes useful for Christian unity.

To Be Born Again

Christ revealed to us that no man can become a member of His Church and an heir of eternal life, unless he goes through a spiritual rebirth. In order to be initiated into the Church man must be born a second time. This process of regeneration begins with Baptism. Man is engrafted into Christ's Mystical Body and made an inheritor of His unfailing promises by being baptized and by accepting Christ as Savior. Baptism is set down by Christ as an absolute condition for Redemption. He made it clear that "unless a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God." He also declared that only "he who believes and is baptized shall be saved."

An individual is baptized by being immersed in water three times "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The trine immersion symbolizes mystically Christ's three day burial and resurrection. "Know ye not," says Holy Scripture, "that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into death. Therefore, we are buried with Him by baptism into death; that like Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection."

The "newness of life" is the life of regeneration which begins in this world and extends into eternity beyond the grave. By sharing in a mystical way in Christ's Passion and Resurrection through Baptism we become new creatures. We are born again. We receive a new birth — not a fleshy, but a spiritual birth. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God." Christ's words

leave no doubt in our mind that unless we are reborn in faith and baptism, we cannot be members of His Church which is the Ark of Salvation, and consequently, we cannot so much as even see His eternal Kingdom.

Furthermore, regeneration through faith and Baptism makes us children of God. We are granted the gift of adoption or sonship. We come out of our mother's womb with the stain of the sin of our first parents, and until we are cleansed in the redeeming waters of regeneration we remain "children of wrath." By virtue of our first and natural birth we are children of the Devil and we dwell under his bondage. We are conceived in sin and unless we are washed in the water of rebirth, we remain destined to eternal perdition in hell. The brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God are rooted in the reality of the Sacrament of Baptism which our Lord Himself instituted. Apart from the Baptismal Font men are not brothers to each other and God is not our Father.

Thus to be a member of the Church is to live the life of inner rebirth. The regenerated man or woman is nearly dead to sin; sin no longer holds dominion over the individual's life. Having renounced sin and the devil, we live in complete subjection to Christ and on the higher, supernatural plane where Baptism has elevated us. From the moment we are baptized we belong to Christ and owe Him our loyalty and total obedience. Rebirth means to be born into a new life and a new world — a life in unity with Christ and a world which overlaps the Kingdom of Heaven. The Orthodox Christian personality becomes radiant with the Divine Spirit of Christ which indwells by virtue of faith and pure living. The acts of the mind and of the will become identified with the divine imperative. The divine will and divine thoughts engage the regenerated soul. Like St. Paul, the new creature of God proclaims: "I live, yet not I; Christ liveth in me!"

A Precious Gift

You were probably baptized far back in your infancy, and, of course, you remember nothing about your Baptism. Indeed, it is

only because your parents have told you that you are even aware of the fact that you have been baptized into the Holy Orthodox Catholic Church. But now that you have reached the age of discretion, it is natural and right for you to inquire about the meaning of your Baptism. It is to your welfare that you learn about the rare privileges that were granted to you at that sacred rite. You will discover that it was in your stead that your Sponsor (godparent) solemnly renounced Satan and acknowledged "Christ as King and God" at your Baptism. But now that you have attained to the age of understanding, you are called upon to investigate the vows that you laid at the altar in the person of your Sponsor.

Now is the time to become familiar with your Lord and Savior. God calls you to assume the solemn obligation that Baptism involves — the obligation of living up to the Christian rule as a soldier and disciple of Christ. God calls upon you to recognize the supreme gift of adoption that was bestowed upon you in that Sacrament of rebirth. God invites you to take full cognizance of your admission into His Holy Church and of your entrance into the sphere of Redemption. To show indifference over these blessings is to throw away your happiness. It is to incur the wrath and condemnation of God Who punishes those who reject His Love and profane His gifts. To ignore the Grace of God is to refuse the Love that Christ has manifested by His death upon the Cross. On the other hand, to value your Baptismal gift and to cherish your most priceless possession in life is to own Christ's Love and the blessings of unending happiness and beatitude.

It is not enough for parents to show concern for the Baptism of their children. Their Baptism must be followed by a serious effort to imbue Christian faith in their young hearts. When children that have been baptized grow into adults who lack faith in Christ then their Baptism is of no benefit to them. Their rebirth does not become consummated. On the contrary, the Baptism which they have received turns into their own condemnation. To accept God's gift and then to despise and reject it is a grave offence. To become a son of God and then to renounce God in unbelief and disobedience incurs a severe penalty. Parents bear a sacred responsibility in this regard and will give an account to God in that last day of Final Judgment.

Glad Tidings

By becoming a member of the Church you have shown that you have accepted the "tidings of great joy" — that God has sent His only-begotten Son into this world of sin to redeem us. You have responded in faith to the wonderful fact that "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son so that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

When God banished Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden because of their disobedience, they lost their fellowship and communion with Him. The human race that descended from them came under divine judgment. All men became outcasts from God. They were born only to be condemned, because all men fell in Adam who represented the totality of mankind. Men did not know their Maker and worshipped creatures instead of the Creator. They paid adoration to false gods. They were powerless to do what was right and to resist what was evil. Separated from God meant to be separated from the source of life and illumination, since man was created to find his end in God.

But God did not abandon man to his well-deserved fate. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to deliver us from sin and death. He came to reconcile us with God; to bring us back into God's fellowship that we might be not only one with Him, but one with the Father also. He ransomed us from the bondage of the Devil by dying upon the Cross. Christ offered Himself, the One for the sake of many, to take our place as an offering for our sins. It was a perfect and vicarious sacrifice for He was perfect and sinless.

Jesus Christ is the New Adam in whom all men are restored to God's grace. He is the progenitor of the new human race redeemed in His Precious Blood. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous."

How great and mighty the Love of God is for man! He restored him to his original righteousness. He undid the wrong committed by the first Adam. Christ suffered the supreme penalty for us. And it is by virtue of His Sacrifice on the Cross that we receive the forgiveness of sins and regeneration in Holy Baptism. We make the

fruits of the Crucifixion our own when with a repentant heart we ask His forgiveness and accept Him as our Savior and His Blood Sacrifice as the payment for our sins. For in Him "we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins."

Such was the work of Christ for man. And such is the work perpetually carried out by the Church which is the Body of Christ. Such is the message of the Orthodox Catholic Church, pure and simple: As the Jewish Prophets of old had foretold, the Messiah came into the world, taught, suffered, died for our sins upon the Cross, and arose from the dead for our justification. He was lifted up to the right hand of God the Father whence He will come again to judge both the living and the dead; Whose Kingdom shall have no end. This is the message of the Gospel, the good news, the "tidings of great joy."

Now is the time to accept Jesus Christ in faith and repentance. It will be too late when we die. Repentance will do us no good in the hereafter; it will serve only as a punishment in Hell.

The Power of Faith

Baptism, which Christ instituted for our salvation, benefits us only when it is combined with faith. "Whosoever believeth and is baptized shall be saved; whosoever believeth not shall be condemned." Faith is the power of inner vision by which you can see God and His revealed truths. It is the faculty whereby we are able to apprehend the teachings of Christ without reservation. The truly believing Christian accepts all the verities of the Church as an act of faith in Jesus Christ. You cannot reject what you dislike or do not understand and accept what you arbitrarily choose. To be a follower of Christ is to bow in obedience on all points to God's authority. It is to accept Christ's Gospel in its entirety, regardless how inscrutable or opposed to your fancies it might be. The Christian revelation is from God, and, as such, cannot be judged by men. We can only trust in His love for us.

To believe in God's revelation is to believe in Christ as His only-

begotten Son Whom He sent into the world in human flesh to save man. The Christian faith, therefore, involves a person-to-person relationship. To be an Orthodox Christian is to be devoted to the Person of Christ, to know Him intimately, to serve Him, and to adore Him. Christianity is not simply a way of life or a code of ethics; it sets us face to face with our Savior and Lord, Who is both God and Man, and Who beckons us with, "Follow me." Christianity is a Christ-centered religion. It requires following in the steps of Christ, being devoted to Him, submitting to His teachings, and trusting in His promises. It is to rely and depend upon Christ for our life and salvation.

The Blessed Lord makes it plain and clear: "Truly, truly I say unto you. He that believeth on me hath everlasting life." Faith is the underlying presupposition of whatever you do as a member of the Church in your Christian life. Nothing you do will be of any avail, unless you have unshaken faith that Christ is the Son of God Who died upon the Cross for your sins. The Bible stresses: "By grace are ye saved through faith." Grace which works in us salvation comes from Christ.

It is not enough to be good and virtuous. Without faith in Christ good works cannot profit us. There are many people who shine with good deeds, but who have no faith in Christ. These may be atheists, Jews, Moslems, or heretics. There is no righteousness apart from the vicarious and redeeming Sacrifice of Christ upon Calvary. Good deeds are worthless in a person who does not believe in Christ.

It is important to keep your relationship with Christ intimate and fervent. To lose sense of Christ's presence in your life is to lose everything. Nothing matters so much as to love Jesus Christ as your Savior and to trust in Him as your Friend and Master in the course of your life's journey. Yet, to be sure, Christ must be accepted within His own Church. No matter how much you believe in Christ and love Him, you are not pleasing Him nor are you helping your soul, unless you are part of His Holy Orthodox Church. Where the Church is with her valid Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, there, too, is Christ.

Emergency Baptism

Since Christ has set down Baptism as necessary for salvation, parents are justified in taking caution to have their infant children baptized as soon as possible after the forty-day blessing. It is only natural to feel grief in the event that an infant child dies from a sudden illness or because of an accident without having been baptized.

An infant that dies without baptism can not be buried according to the sacred rites of the Church. This holds true with regard to any non-Christian and unbaptized individual. A human soul that departs this world without baptism is burdened with the bondage of the Devil, because it lacks the purity and adoption that comes with baptism. Whether or not the soul of an unbaptized infant suffers divine condemnation is a matter we can only leave to God's inscrutable wisdom. Our duty is to heed to the commandment of God in obedience. The only certainty is that an infant's soul which has not been regenerated in baptism will not share the supreme blessedness which those souls have attained by striving in obedience, Christian perseverance, and patience.

In the case of serious illness, a child can receive an emergency baptism in the hands even of a layman (who is an Orthodox or at least a non-Orthodox Christian). For example, the parent, doctor, or nurse can perform the baptism under such rare circumstances. This is called "clinical baptism" and is done by pouring water over the head of the child and saying simultaneously the baptismal formula: "The servant of God (name) is baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

However, if there is not time to get water, the child should be lifted in the air and moved in the sign of the Cross, while the baptismal formula is being said at the same time. This is known as "baptism in air."

If the baptized child survives, then it is brought to the Church where the Priest only supplements the baptism by reciting the customary baptismal prayers, seals it with the Holy Chrism, and administers the Holy Communion.

"Clinical baptism" is fully valid and cannot be repeated. By the

same token an adult who has professed faith in Christ can be baptized in bed in the event of serious illness.

Baptizing by pouring, therefore, is acceptable only in rare cases of critical illness. The normal method of baptizing is by trine immersion and cannot be replaced by pouring. Efforts should be taken to secure the proper baptismal font in which an adult can be baptized by trine immersion. Indifference in this regard is a serious matter, because the historical practice of immersion is symbolic of the three-day burial and resurrection of Christ. In baptism the individual dies and rises with Christ mystically. An ancient canon of the Church prohibits those who have received "clinical baptism" to be ordained to the Priesthood. This is an indication of the mind of the historical Church with respect to the importance of trine immersion at baptism.

Churching of Women

Our Holy Church is a loving mother. She shows great tenderness to her children from the very moment they enter this life. As soon as a child is born in your family, it is well to notify the Priest to come for the first blessing. He will offer up the designated prayers that "the Lord may preserve the mother and new born child from all evil, shelter them under the covering of His wings, forgive the mother's trespasses, raise her from the bed of sickness and vouchsafe that her babe may do reverence to His Holy Temple."

The second blessing of the child falls on the eighth day after birth. On this day according to the age-old practice of the Church, the parents bring the child in front of the entrance of the Church to show, so to speak, their intention and desire to have it initiated into the Body of Christ so that it may enter the House of God and offer up worship. The Priest will meet the child, bless it, and give it a Christian name, praying to Almighty God that "the light of His countenance be signed on it; that it be signed with the Cross of the only-begotten Son of God in its heart and understanding; that it may flee from the vanity of the world and every evil device of the Enemy

and may keep God's commandments, and that the name of God may remain on it forever unrenounced."

The third blessing before Baptism takes place on the fortieth day after birth when the mother carries the child into the Church to present it to the Lord. It is the first visit of both mother and child into the Church since the delivery. The practice is observed in imitation of the Blessed Virgin who, on the fortieth day after the birth of Jesus, brought the Divine Infant into the Temple where it was received by St. Simeon the Just. The mother accompanied by the father should remain seated in the narthex (vestibule of the Church) and not advance into the Church proper. There the Priest will bless the mother and child, praying that the Lord may bless them both, purify and sanctify the mother and hold her worthy to receive the Holy Communion. The infant is then given to the Priest who carries it into the Nave of the Church, while the mother should follow behind, proceed to the Iconostasis, where she reverences and kisses the holy icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary, giving thanks and veneration. If the child is a male it is carried by the Priest into the sanctuary around the Holy Table; if it is a female it is held in front of the Middle Doors of the sanctuary and lifted into the air in the sign of the Cross while the proper prayers are simultaneously said by the Priest.

The most appropriate time for the forty day purification blessing is prior to the Divine Liturgy, since the mother can receive the Holy Communion during the service which is to follow. It is not serious if the blessing is given a few days after the fortieth day; it should not be earlier than the fortieth day. Thus the mother must take the effort to prepare and to receive the Blessed Sacraments on the day of her purification as a proper expression of thanksgiving and as a means of spiritual and bodily healing and sanctification. The very prayers which the Priest says make explicit reference to the Holy Communion which the mother is expected to receive.

Strictly speaking, the name is given formally on the eighth day — not at Baptism. The eighth day blessing marks the name-giving event; it is not necessarily connected with Baptism. It is not the right of the sponsor to give the name. This is the prerogative of the parents.

Since hospitals require that a name be designated for the infant immediately at birth, the parents must be prepared in advance. It is important for them to remember that their child should be given an Orthodox Christian name and not simply one chosen arbitrarily, at random, or merely because it sounds "nice." Traditionally it is the name of the grandparents with the name of the paternal grandfather or grandmother having priority.

It is equally important to know that in the Orthodox Church only one name is given to a new-born child and not two names. It has become fashionable to give two names, but there is no justifying basis for this habit in Orthodox belief and tradition and must be carefully avoided. The one and only name which is pronounced over the Baptismal font by the Priest remains attached to the soul for all eternity. It is the name "remembered" at the Altar after death: one, distinct name for one, distinct soul. Consequently, careful attention should be shown by parents when the time comes to name their child.

The original Baptismal name is sacred and to tamper with it is a serious matter, as well as a violation of the Orthodox practice of honoring and venerating the saints of Christ. Once the name of a saint is given, it should not be different in the English rendering. Proper names are never translated; they are only transliterated. The name is the same in every language. For example, "Vasilios" should not be translated into "William" in the English, but rather "Basil." "Demetrius" is not "James," but simply "Demetrius." "Athanasius" should remain "Athanasius" and not "Thomas" or "Arthur." "Panayiotis" is "Panayiotis" in any language and not "Peter."

To change the name from Greek into English is essentially to give a second name. Thus a person receives two names in reality. "Demetrius" and "James," for example, are not the same name. They are two names and the individual is actually named after St. Demetrius and St. James. He becomes related to two patron saints. By altering the original name we are violating the Orthodox practice of observing namedays. Every child should be taught by the parents who his or her patron saint is and should be trained to look forward with joy to the observance of the nameday. For Orthodox Christians the nameday is of more significance than the birthday. Part of the celebration of this holy day is the obligation of attending the Divine

Liturgy and receiving the Holy Communion. It also is proper and spiritually profitable to offer a Proskomide to the Holy Table. Good Orthodox parents always provide their children with the holy icon of their patron saint which they place on the wall usually over their bed. It also makes an excellent gift for godchildren.

Sponsors in Baptism

Serving as a sponsor at Baptism is always a joyful occasion. But in order to gain lasting joy that comes from this function, it is important to understand the meaning of what the sponsor does at Baptism and what is expected of him subsequent to Baptism. If we can never enjoy any activity in which we are engaged unless we are aware of what we are doing, how much more does this hold true within the sphere of our religious life. In any religious function man's immortal soul is involved and it behooves us to know what we are doing or saying when we take part in it.

It is pathetic to see how lightly sponsors take their participation in Baptism. Indeed for many people it has become merely a social custom in which social interests become the only important consideration for the parents of the child and for the sponsor.

Before you accept to become a sponsor make certain you have thought through seriously the sacred responsibility which you are to assume for the child that will be baptized. To show indifference in this respect is to commit a very grave sin in the sight of Almighty God. Every sponsor becomes accountable to God as to whether or not he has discharged his duties to the child which he has sponsored.

The need for a sponsor at Baptism is directly related to infant Baptism. Since the infant is unable to make the necessary confession of faith, the sponsor stands and vouches for it. Some people ask the question: "Would it not be more practical and preferable to baptize only those who are old enough to make their own confession of faith?"

There is no doubt that Baptism would be more meaningful for

Christian believers if they were baptized at an age when they could understand Baptism truly as a new beginning in life and as a true rebirth in Christ. There would be no need then for sponsors.

We can see the wisdom of the Church, however, when we remember that our Lord Jesus Christ teaches that Baptism is the condition for winning eternal life. He clearly states that "unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." In addition the Lord said: "Whosoever believeth and is baptized shall be saved."

Without Baptism along with the Chrismation and the Holy Communion which follows, the human soul has no share in the blessings of Redemption. According to the revealed word of God, every man is born with the guilt of the sin of our first parents. Everyone enters into the world as a "child of wrath." It is only through faith in Christ and Baptism that man becomes a child of God and heir of His eternal Kingdom. Every natural, carnal birth must be followed by the spiritual rebirth, which comes with faith and Baptism.

To die without having been baptized is to jeopardize one's eternal state and to be estranged from the Kingdom of Heaven. It is for this reason, therefore, that infant baptism became a universal practice very early in the history of the Church. Uncertainty as to the day and hour of death accounts for the custom of baptizing infants soon after birth.

The sponsor is the representative of the infant which is being admitted into the Church of Christ. He speaks for the infant and vows that he will make certain that the child will grow to be a true soldier of Christ and a devoted member of His Church. He accepts the sacred responsibility of guiding the child into the understanding and practice of the teachings of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In behalf of the infant the sponsor makes the renunciation of the Devil during the baptismal rite. He promises that the child will grow to renounce the Devil both in word and in deed and to repudiate his tempting influence. He answers to the interrogations put to him by the Priest:

"Dost thou renounce Satan and all his angels and all his works and all his service and all his pride?"

"Hast thou renounced Satan?"

Both question are addressed three times to the sponsor who responds three times with "I do renounce him" and "I have renounced him," respectively. The renunciation of Satan is followed by the directive of the Priest: "Blow and spit upon him." The sponsor replies by blowing three times into the air away from the sanctuary in the direction of the rear of the Church and also spits three times in the same fashion. This is the customary way of expressing contempt for the Devil and of banishing him from one's presence.

The sponsor then turns in the opposite direction, that is, towards the sanctuary, and responds to the second part of the Priest's interrogation:

"Dost thou unite thyself unto Christ?"

"Hast thou united thyself unto Christ?"

He replies with:

"I do unite myself unto Christ."

"I have united myself unto Christ."

Then the Priest continues with: "Dost thou believe in Him?" The sponsor replies with: "I believe in Him as my King and as my God."

As soon as this reply is made, the sponsor recites the Creed. It is imperative that the sponsor be prepared to say the Creed of the Faith. The custom of having the Cantor recite it should be avoided. Knowledge of the Creed and familiarity with it constitutes the basic prerequisite for becoming a sponsor. It is the height of the mockery of Holy Baptism when the sponsor is unable to recite the Creed which is the symbol of the Orthodox Faith into which the child is being admitted.

After the Creed the Priest once again directs the question to the sponsor: "Hast thou united thyself unto Christ?" He replies with: "I have united myself with Christ." This interrogation and answer is made three times. Then the Priest directs: "Bow down also and adore Him." The sponsor, making a profound bow, says: "I adore the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, one in Essence and undivided."

Subsequent to the blessing of the water in the font, the Priest anoints the infant with oil which is also hallowed by the Priest

through prayer. The Priest dips the three fingers of his right hand into the blessed oil poured from the bottle into the sponsor's right hand which is cupped over the palm of the left hand and held above the font. The sponsor dries the excess oil from his hands on the child's body and then prepares to receive the infant into his arms wrapped in a sheet. Following the Chrismation, he washes the oil from his hands with soap over the font, while the child is being dressed by the women in charge. It should be noted that the sponsor provides the new white clothing for the child, as well as a small bottle of oil, three candles, two bath towels, and a bar of soap.

In the event there are two or more children being baptized, then the sponsors make the replies together in unison during the interrogation and hold the oil each in turn according to the age of the children. It is not only perfectly legitimate and proper to have two or more children baptized during the same service and in the sanctified water of the same font, but it is historically and theologically normative and ideal. The practice of reading through the baptismal rite three, four, or more times during the same day is unnecessary. To pour out the blessed water and sanctify water anew for each child is to show sheer irreverence to the sanctity of the water which was once blessed and which remains forever blessed by virtue of the descent of the Holy Spirit. Baptism is not a private service. It is just as corporate as the Divine Liturgy. Parents who insist on a private service are guilty either of ignorance or of pride and possibly of both. Repeating the prayers and the invocation of the Holy Spirit on the same day is totally unwarranted, wholly impractical, completely untheological, and historically untenable!

Qualifying as a Sponsor

Since faith must go hand in hand with Baptism, as was pointed out above, the sponsor makes a pledge in behalf of the infant, as it were, saying: "Lord, accept this infant as Thy child, a member of Thy Holy Church, and as an inheritor of Thy Kingdom. I confess Thee as my King and my God and I solemnly vow that this child

will grow to know Thee and to confess Thy Holy Name both in word and in deed."

Obviously the sponsor must be a professing and practicing member of the Orthodox Catholic Church, of unblemished character, upright, and blameless in his moral and spiritual life. The person who lives in a state of mortal sin cannot be a sponsor. How can he confess a faith which he ignores and violates in word and in deed! How can he promise God that he will make certain that the child will grow to be a true follower of Christ, while he himself lives a life of unbelief and disobedience! It is a travesty of the sacred office of the sponsor when indifference and apathy is shown in this respect.

It only stands to reason that a Protestant or a Roman Catholic cannot sponsor a child at an Orthodox Baptism. An Orthodox who has not had his marriage blessed in the Orthodox Church is also excluded from exercising the privilege of serving as a sponsor. At all events, the Priest, as the guardian of the mysteries of the Faith, has the right and the obligation to refuse an individual from being a sponsor, if he has reason to believe that he is morally and spiritually unqualified and unfit. It is for this reason that the vigilant Priest will in every case meet with the prospective sponsor in advance of the day of the Baptism in order to become acquainted with him and to verify his spiritual integrity.

Parents should exercise caution and care in selecting sponsors for their children. Not social and financial status—but moral character and dedication should be the factors in determining who is to be a sponsor. If we truly love our children and have their eternal welfare at heart, we will always be careful in our choice. If we are truly concerned about the spiritual development of our children, we will prefer the most godly and most pious Christian. How pitiful it is to see parents totally absorbed with the preparations for the reception and the invitation of guests at the time of their child's Baptism, while they remain wholly unconcerned as to the moral fitness of the sponsor they have chosen!

It is a gross misunderstanding to think that the duty of the sponsor ends with the conclusion of the Baptismal service. The real work of the sponsor only begins then. At the close of the service the

sponsor solemnly delivers the child into the arms of the mother in front of the congregation. As she receives her child, now baptized, sealed, and illuminated, she kisses the hand of the sponsor as a token of the spiritual relationship that is established between the sponsor and the family. It is a Christian expression of gratitude and respect.

For three consecutive Sundays thereafter the sponsor will carry the child to the Sanctuary to receive the Holy Communion. He will hold the lighted baptismal candle each time, which—it is assumed—he has taken with him at the end of the Baptismal service for this purpose.

A good sponsor maintains a close connection with his godchild. Uppermost in his mind is the progress of the child in the knowledge and practice of the Orthodox Faith. His association with the child is at all times spiritually edifying. The child learns to respect his godparent and whenever he greets him he kisses his hand, as he is being kissed on the face. This is the usual manner of showing respect in the Orthodox tradition. It is up to the parents to teach their child what this spiritual relationship means and to encourage the child to love and respect his godfather or godmother.

The godparent rejoices as he beholds his child in God develop physically, mentally, and spiritually. He prays that his godchild will be a faithful follower of Christ Whom he confessed at Baptism in its place. Whenever it is possible he accompanies his godchild to the Altar for the Holy Communion.

It is customary to express his affection by buying gifts for the child, especially on festive occasions, like Christmas and birthday anniversaries. In their selection of gifts godparents would do well to prefer religious items rather than the usual clothing, toys, money, etc. Such objects as icons, medallions, a Bible, religious books are more expressive of a spiritual relationship and more helpful in building up the spiritual life of the child. The child can be orientated in a Christian direction even before it reaches the age of discretion by being exposed to children's books with illustrations of Christ and the saints. Parents and relatives usually provide the child with enough clothing and toys, as gifts.

If you are planning to sponsor a child at Baptism, here are a few points to take into consideration in the way of preparation:

(1) If you are approached and asked to serve as a sponsor for a child, do not answer immediately. Reflect and examine your conscience. Ask yourself if you could be true to the Baptismal vows.

(2) No one is perfect. Sincerity is important. It is a good practice to make your Confession and to receive the Holy Communion on the day of the Baptism. In the words of the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (dated second century), "Before the baptism let the baptizer and him who is to be baptized fast, and any others who are able. And thou shalt bid him who is to be baptized to fast one or two days before."

(3) Reflect prayerfully on the task which lies before you and ask for the grace that comes from above that you may be enabled to discharge faithfully the duties of a sponsor.

(4) Make certain you understand the Baptismal rite, its different parts, and the symbolism.

(5) Study the Creed and be prepared to recite it when the Priest calls upon you.

(6) Consult with your Pastor in advance of the day of the Baptism so that you will be prepared to answer correctly to the interrogation during the Baptismal rite. He will be more than happy to meet with you to discuss the Baptism in which you will be the sponsor.

In the event that parents cannot find a sponsor for the Baptism of their child, it has been a custom for the mother to lay the child in front of the Sanctuary in the presence of the congregation. The first person that leaves his seat and reaches the child indicates his desire to volunteer to be the sponsor. It is a wonderful gesture of Christian love and faith which Almighty God rewards richly.

Where Do You Stand?

If you have not received Holy Baptism, you can make the momentous decision to accept Christ as your Savior and to repent of your sins in order to win God's forgiveness. You can humble your-

self before His Mercy and Love in sincere contrition. Then approach the Baptismal Font to be washed in the redeeming waters of rebirth after receiving the required instruction from the Priest.

If, however, you have already received Baptism, but now are living under the sway of pride and disobedience, it is necessary for you to repent also. If you are one of those who have been neglecting their baptismal vows and their solemn responsibilities as children of God, then only penance can re-instate you to full communion with Christ and His Church. You cannot be baptized again in water. But you can be re-baptized in the tears of repentance. If you have stained your baptismal garment with sinful living and spiritual indifference you should approach your Father Confessor with humility and contrition; he will listen to your sins and counsel you accordingly. There in your earnest act of confession you will find the beginning of your restoration to the baptismal state of grace.

Remember that God's Mercy is infinite. His loving kindness finds many expressions. In the Mystery and Sacrament of Baptism the sinner is made a child of God; in the Mystery of Exomologesis (Penance) the sinning child and prodigal son is given the chance to regain his baptismal holiness by showing the fruits of repentance. True repentance requires humility, sincerity, self-abasement and faith in Christ as a loving Redeemer, as well as a determination never to sin again. The Holy Spirit tells us in Scripture: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

We cannot hope to make the precious gift of salvation our own unless we preserve the sanctity and purity which we received at Baptism. Having violated God's will and offended Him, we forfeit the blessings of sanctification and justification. Yet, there always remains the hope for forgiveness through repentance; and penance we must do if we are in sin. "Repent; the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" Such was the first message of Christ as He embarked on His earthly ministry. And such is the message and call of the Orthodox Catholic Church directed to the world, as it always has been now for twenty centuries.

Making Your Confession

The fact that we are regenerated through Baptism and faith, receiving the gift of adoption, does not mean that we are immuned to sin. Though cleansed that we are from the stain of original sin and absolved from divine condemnation, we, nevertheless, bear within us a deep-seated inclination toward evil. The law of the flesh and the law of the mind are always warring each other. The Christian life involves basically an inner battle. The devil presses on in a struggle to win back a soul that Christ has redeemed through Baptism and faith. The Bible speaks of the devil as a "roaring lion which seeks to devour a soul."

It is possible, therefore, to sin even after Baptism. We are susceptible to being overcome by sin and its consequences. We are liable to falling back into sin and surrendering the glorious promises of Christ. Such sinfulness separates us from God Who banishes us from the Garden of Eden. We give up Heaven for Hell. We sacrifice eternal blessings for pleasures of the moment. We soil our baptismal garment and lose admission into the Heavenly Marriage Feast about which Christ has spoken in the Bible.

Yet, we need not despair if we have been overcome by our human frailty. God is merciful and gives us a chance to return to our baptismal state of purity. He calls us to repentance. To repent is to be sorrowful for breaking God's commandment and to resolve never to sin again. The extent of penance is proportionate to the extent and gravity of the sin which we have committed. Forgiveness is ours only insofar as we have shown sincere repentance that expresses itself in tears and in the "fruits of repentance." Feigned and half-hearted repentance might deceive the Priest, but never God Who searches the hearts of men.

To confess one's sins is evidence of a sincerely repenting soul. Pardon comes only with the act of declaring openly our transgressions. In the word of God we are told "if we confess our sins, Christ is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The Precious Blood of Christ washes us from the stain of sin when we acknowledge our iniquities in grief and remorse.

Confession can be made in two ways: privately in one's daily prayers and in auricular Sacramental Confession before the Priest. Confession is a normal part of the spiritual life of every professing and practicing Orthodox Christian. It should be part of each prayer we offer up to Almighty God. Our morning and evening prayers especially should include the acknowledgment of the sins that we may have committed or generally of our sinful indifference and unworthiness in the sight of God.

Christians are always exposed to temptations from morning until night, day in and day out, and they often commit sins of thought (even the best of Christians), of word, and of deed. No man is sinless in this sense. Hence, everyone must repent daily, if we are to be forgiven daily. Confession is not to be put off for rare occasions during the year. We must confess our sins daily, if we are to receive forgiveness daily.

In the Lord's prayer we say: "Forgive us our trespasses." Christ teaches us by means of this model prayer that we must beg forgiveness of God in our daily prayers. St. Augustine tells us: "Baptism is for all sins. For light sins, without which we cannot be, there is prayer. What prayer? 'Forgive us our trespasses.' Once only are we washed in baptism; but daily are we washed by prayer."

Confession Before the Priest

We can include in our daily prayers a general supplication: "Jesus Christ, Son of God, I have sinned before You and before heaven; have mercy upon me and save me!" This is a general confession which should be supplemented by more specific mention of one's sins.

To repent and to confess daily is essential to a healthy spiritual life. Repentance and confession need not be restricted to auricular confession before a Priest. St. John Chrysostom writes: "Behold, we have pointed out five ways of repentance. First, the acknowledgment

of our sins; secondly, forgiving the sins of our neighbor; thirdly, through prayer; fourthly, through alms-giving; fifthly, through humility. Do not delay, but take all of these ways each day!"

To seek absolution from the Priest after making your confession to him involves a sacramental act. Such sacramental confession is indispensable in the case of grave sins. St. Augustine teaches us: "But those sins for which it is necessary that you be separated from the Body of Christ, do not commit them. No. For those whom you see doing penance, have committed crimes, adultery, or some dreadful deed. Therefore are they doing penance. For if their sins had been light, then would the daily prayer have been enough. Therefore, in three ways are sins remitted in the Church: by Baptism, by prayer, and by the greater humility of Penance."

The person who commits a grave sin which separates him from God should approach his Father Confessor with sentiments of sorrow and humility. In the tears of repentance he should lay open his sin and offense before the Priest, as before God. The Priest is Christ's representative on earth and it is to him that authority has been given to forgive sins, to instruct, and to pronounce Absolution. Priests and Bishops are the successors of the Apostles of Christ and, as such, are empowered with their authority. They were given the power to forgive sins when Jesus said to them: "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, the are retained."

"How often should I go to Confession?" is a frequent question. Whenever you fall into serious sin in which case you need to be reconciled with God and His Holy Church. Grave or mortal sin which separates you from God and condemns you to eternal perdition is such as murder, apostasy, serious false-witnessing, adultery, fornication, and acts of pride that cause serious injury to your neighbor. It is a good practice, however, to go at least once a year to confess to your Spiritual Father even the less serious sins of thought and sins of omission.

The Priest should not be approached only to confess our sins for Sacramental Absolution. Every good Orthodox turns to his Priest frequently for spiritual counseling and guidance. He does not wait

for urgent needs. He visits his Priest often to speak to him about his spiritual life and to seek his paternal advice as regards his growth in faith and virtue. An intimate chat with the Priest in his private study is very often the answer to the spiritual need of most people. Even secular minded authorities in psychiatry are beginning to recognize the therapeutic value of the Sacrament of Confession and generally of talking to the Priest on a deeper level.

The Father Confessor

Every good Orthodox Christian places himself under the spiritual care of his Priest. Growth and progress in the spiritual life come only with the guidance that the Pastor can give you. Isolation and independence can lead to spiritual harm; it very often distorts our self-evaluation and prevents an accurate perspective of our spiritual development.

According to St. Callistus of Xanthopolis it is necessary to cleave to our spiritual Father "with body and spirit like a devoted son to his father and from then onwards obey all his commands implicitly, accord with him in everything, and see him not as a mere man, but as Christ Himself. Casting out all doubt and unbelief, as well as all thoughts and desires of your own, follow your teacher step by step, as though you were a mirror; follow him as your own conscience, observing total and unquestioned obedience."

If we spare no effort to find the best qualified physician for our physical illnesses, how much more important is it to search out the best qualified physician for the infirmities of our soul. If our immortal soul is far more precious than the body, then we must seek to find a truly spiritual man to whom to entrust its being. "Is it, therefore, possible to think that a man leads a Divine life in accordance to the word of God, if he lives without a guide, pandering to himself and obeying his own self-will? Naturally not."

The truly dedicated Priest shows the concern and tenderness of a father. His love and sympathy are far stronger than those of a natural father for his child. St. John Chrysostom teaches us that

"the two [i.e. parent and Priest] indeed differ as much as the present and the future life. For our natural parents generate us unto this life only, but the other unto that which is to come."

The Priest is our spiritual Father to whom we owe more obedience and respect than to our own natural father. All those in the care of the Priest are his spiritual children. It is not enough to address our Priest as "Father"; we must strive to make him a true father, because he stands as the image of God, our Heavenly Father.

We cannot, however, expect any profit to come to our soul, if we want our Priest to be just a "regular fellow" and a "good Joe." When in the presence of the Priest, the good Orthodox tries to feel that he is in the company of God's representative and shepherd of Christ. He wants his Priest to be spiritual, not worldly. In the words of St. Simeon, "A man who has acquired active faith in his father in God, when seeing him thinks he sees Christ Himself; and being in his presence or following him, firmly believes that he is with Christ and follows Christ."

The Priest, as "another Christ," reconciles the sinner to God by pronouncing absolution when he judges that the penitent has proved his repentance. Without the absolution of the Priest there is no forgiveness of grave sins. In the Sacrament of Confession the Priest exercises a supremely sacred authority. In the words of St. John Chrysostom, "they who rule on earth have indeed authority to bind, but only the body, whereas this binding lays hold of the soul and penetrates the Heaven and what Priests do here below God ratifies above and the Master confirms the sentence of His servants. For indeed what is it but all manner of heavenly authority which He has given them when He says, 'Whose sins ye remit they are remitted and whose sins ye retain they are retained,' what authority could be greater than this?"

The Priestly Ministry

The sacred power with which the Priest accompanies man from the cradle to the grave is of divine origin. Christ Himself instituted the Priesthood which He imparts through the Sacrament of Ordina-

tion. As the Incarnate Son of God and true God of true God, He willed that His redeeming mission after His Ascension be carried out in the world by means of this sacred office. Our Blessed Lord uses the Priest as His instrument in working out the salvation of man.

The Priest who is chosen by Christ and elevated to the sacerdotal office is another Apostle, since his ordination can be traced back in an uninterrupted succession to one of the original Apostles. Like them, the Priest is one sent by Christ into the world. "As my Father hath sent me, even so I send you." Those who are ordained to the Priesthood are commissioned by Christ to go forth among men and to lead them to the Gospel of His Kingdom. It is in the person of the Priest that the Savior makes His will known to men. He is the divinely appointed herald of the glad tidings of redemption and the one who is empowered to administer the Sacraments of the Church. The ordained Priest speaks and labors with the authority vested in him by our Lord Jesus Christ.

As another Apostle, the Priest is charged with the responsibility of carrying out the three-fold Apostolic ministry, namely, that of preaching the word of God, administering the Sacraments, and exercising pastoral administration over the Church.

The Lord makes His will known to men through the agency of His Priests. The divine Master speaks through the mouth of the Priest. He employs the Priest in leading men into His Heavenly Kingdom. Such a function of the Priesthood makes the Priest essentially a teacher and leader of men. Leadership is delegated by Christ to each Priest at Ordination. A wise Priest will always accept to listen to the views of his devout laymen, but no lay member of the Church has the right to interfere in the discharging of his teaching and leadership responsibility.

The thought uppermost in the mind of the Priest is how to seek out those souls that have strayed away from the pastures of Truth and holiness and how to sustain the spiritual life of those within the pale of the Church. He strives toward this end with the conviction that he is laboring with God in the salvation of human souls and that "of all divine things the most divine is to co-operate with God for the salvation of souls."

The truly dedicated Priest shows the concern and tenderness of a father. His love and sympathy are far stronger than those of a natural father for his child. St. John Chrysostom teaches us that "the two [i.e., parents and Priests] indeed differ as much as the present and the future life. For our natural parents generate us unto this life only, but the others unto that which is to come." The Priest is our spiritual father to whom we owe more obedience and respect than to our own natural father. All those in the care of the Priest are his spiritual children. It is not enough to address our Priest as "Father"; we must strive to make him a true Father.

The Priest is at our side from the moment we enter the world to the time we depart—from the cradle to the grave. To him we should turn with our spiritual problems. In him we must confide the inmost secrets of our hearts. To him we must show due love and reverence. His is a weighty cross that presses heavily on his shoulders very often. We can be helpful by praying for him and by being ready at all times to show him every courtesy and respect. What a wonderful custom it is in the Orthodox Church to kiss the Priest's hand when greeting him! It demonstrates the Orthodox layman's acknowledgment of the sublime dignity of the Priesthood. He reverences the Priestly hand that consecrates and holds the Body of Christ and which bestows divine blessing.

Since the Priest labors in the service of God, he must be called by God. The Lord commits His Church to the guidance of those that He chooses. He clearly speaks to every Priest today just as He had spoken to His disciples: "You have not chosen me; but I have chosen you and have appointed you, that you should go and should bring forth fruit." Parents, Priests, and Church School teachers can serve as media of God's inviting call to a young man. They can help immensely in cultivating the vocation in our Orthodox youth. It is no doubt chiefly the responsibility of the parents to imbue in their sons the desire to become a Priest. But, to be sure, the parents themselves must be conscious of the supreme dignity of the Priestly office. God-fearing parents consider it an honor to dedicate their boy to the ministry of the Gospel of Christ. No parents can be more fortunate and blessed than those that are privileged to behold their son celebrating the Divine Liturgy and heralding the word of God from the pulpit.

Parents can be instrumental in awakening in their son the calling which might possibly be dormant within them. They can protect and foster the traits which are indicative of a Priestly vocation. Above all, sensible parents speak of their own parish Priest with the utmost respect in the home and refrain from making disparaging remarks about him. For, how can a boy respect his Priest, least of all, aspire to become a Priest, when the local Pastor is criticized in the home? Parents commit a serious sin, when they become the cause for their children to lose reverence for their religion and for the representative of their religion.

Since a good Christian seeks to improve his spiritual life at all times, he is never offended when the Priest censures him for some possible neglect of duty. When the Priest reproaches us we must feel that he is simply fulfilling his pastoral obligation. A conscientious Pastor of souls is not a back-slapper. St. Paul warns against flattery. "Do I speak to please men? For if I were to please men, I would not be the servant of Christ."

To speak of the Priest disrespectfully or to malign him is an offence which is punishable by God. St. John Chrysostom teaches that "They who disrespect the Priests would be far more accursed than Dathan and his company and deserve more severe punishment." In the Old Testament we read that "the earth opened her mouth and swallowed Dathan and his followers. . . . Then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the Lord." If the Old Testament Priests were regarded with such esteem, how much more reverently should the Priests, who serve the Testament in the Blood of Christ, be regarded!

The Priest for disciplinary purposes has the right to withhold both the antidoron and the Holy Communion from those who disobey his spiritual counsel or traduce him. Indeed it is his duty. The Priest is the guardian of what is holy and sacred. St. Basil instructs the Priests "not to forget the Master's commandment and that of the Holy Apostles: 'Give not what is holy to the dogs and do not cast the pearls to the swine.' Watch that thou givest not the Son of God into the hands of the unworthy. Do not shirk before the glorious ones of the earth in that hour, nor even him who wears the royal diadem."

In the tradition of the Orthodox Church nothing could be more terrible for our soul than coming under the wrath or curse of a Priest. On the other hand, nothing can be more fortunate for us than coming under the guiding and blessing hand of him whom God has appointed to lead us to salvation.

Supper of Salvation

You were created by God that you might live forever. He created you out of nothingness and invites you to share in His eternity and Divine life. When sin made its entry into the world, however, disease, corruption, and death came upon all men. Mankind became alienated from God and was no longer capable of uniting with His Holy Spirit. But by virtue of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ man is called to return to the fellowship of the quickening and sanctifying Spirit in order to attain incorruption and eternity which were originally intended for man.

The baptized believer looks at Christ's Sacrifice as an ever-present reality— not simply something of the past. It is not merely an event that occurred some two thousand years ago on Calvary. Each time the Holy Communion service is celebrated upon the Altar we are given the chance to re-experience the reality of Redemption that flows from the Cross. At every celebration we are called upon to share in the fruits of His vicarious Sacrifice—union with God and everlasting life—by sharing in the Body and Blood of Christ.

The Lord assured us at the Last Supper when He took bread and, giving it to His Disciples, said: "Take, eat, this is my Body which is broken for you." He took the Cup also, saying: "Drink ye all of this, for this is Blood of the New Testament which is shed for you." The Bible teaches us that "as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come."

Holy Communion (called also the Divine Mysteries) is the Body and Blood of Christ under the appearance of bread and wine. The elements look like bread and wine; they taste like bread and wine;

but they are no longer bread and wine after the Priest consecrates them by invoking the Holy Spirit upon them. Before us we have the living and glorified Body and Blood of Christ. It is the marvelous manner that God has given us with which we are given the opportunity to unite with Him in Christ, to receive forgiveness, to strengthen our spiritual lives, and to attain to immortality and eternal life.

Our Blessed Lord explicitly said that "he that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood dwelleth in me and I in him." Apart from the Holy Communion there is no union with God and fellowship with His Holy Spirit. Together with Baptism, Holy Communion is set forth as an absolute condition for salvation. The words of Christ are unequivocal in their meaning: "Truly, truly I say unto you: unless ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you; whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day."

In receiving the Communion our weakness unites with God's omnipotence. We are reinforced in our spiritual life. We are enabled to fight off sin and do the will of God more readily. We take into our body and soul Christ in His humanity and Divinity. He condescends to come into our sinful souls and bodies and there to make His abode. We can achieve union with Him even from now in this present world and foretaste of everlasting blessedness. Our union with Him begins in this life and extends into eternity beyond the grave. We receive the assurance that He will raise us when He comes for the Final Judgment and that He will admit us into His Kingdom where we shall live forever in celestial joy.

Since we do not know the hour or day when we shall depart this ephemeral world, it is imperative that we receive the Holy Communion as frequently as possible. In this way our soul will always be prepared to make its exit in a state of forgiveness and the chances to win the Kingdom of Heaven will never be jeopardized.

Going to Church

Our Sunday morning obligation does not involve simply "going to Church." It means that we "attend the Divine Liturgy." It is not

merely a matter of being present at another Church service.

The Divine Liturgy is not just the Sunday service. It is more than a prayer service. It is a sacramental participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When we are present at the Liturgy we are offered the blessings and gifts of God's Love that flow from Christ's vicarious sacrifice of Calvary. We find ourselves at the Holy Communion service at which the gifts of bread and wine are consecrated upon the altar and offered up, as the Precious Body and Blood of Christ, for the remission of our sins and for everlasting life. It is the Lord's Supper at which we are invited to participate and to receive of the living Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Consequently, the Divine Liturgy is a service of redemption. As the perpetuation of the Atonement, it is the chief act of worship and adoration in the Orthodox Church. When it is celebrated we do not pray as individuals. It is the body of believers which offers up the sacrifice in the person of the Priest. It is corporate worship. The Church—the Body of Christ—unites before the throne of Divine Majesty in a renewed identity with her Divine Head. The Church Triumphant consisting of the departed souls joins with the Church Militant on earth in one Body of the redeemed faithful.

Christ instituted this Holy Sacrament in the evening of Holy Thursday, the night before He died, when He and the twelve Apostles were assembled at the last supper. On this occasion He took bread, blessed and broke it, saying: "Take ye and eat. This is my body." Then He took a cup of wine, blessed it and gave it to the Apostles, saying: "Drink ye all of this. This is my blood which is shed for the remission of sins. Do this for a commemoration of me."

The Priests, as successors of the Apostles, were given power by Christ to re-enact this holy act and to change bread into His Body and wine into His Blood. In the person of the Priest, Christ again is with us inviting us to the mystic feast of redemption and immortality. "When thou seest the Lord sacrificed and laid upon the Altar," St. John Chrysostom writes, "and the Priest standing and praying over the victim and all the worshippers empurpled with that precious Blood, canst thou then think that thou art still among men and standing upon the earth? Art thou not, on the contrary, straightway translated to Heaven?"

By exercising his sacerdotal office, the Priest perpetuates Christ's function as a mediator between man and God. At the sacrifice of the Divine Liturgy the Priest approaches God as the representative of the people. He intercedes for them. There at the Altar where Heaven and earth do meet he lifts up his hands to God and prays for the forgiveness of our sins. To have one's name "remembered" at the Divine Liturgy, whether of the living or departed, is a blessing of inestimable worth. "Pray for me, Father," is a frequent request of a good Orthodox Christian.

To be spiritually united with the Priest at worship is to be assured of receiving God's grace into our hearts. On the other hand, to be alienated from him by impure words or thoughts that dishonor him is to forfeit the blessings that flow from the Altar. It is to exclude ourselves from the Sanctuary which is the source of our redemption. "He who is within the Sanctuary is pure," notes St. Ignatius of Antioch, "but he who is without the Sanctuary is not pure; that is to say, whoever acts in disregard to the Bishop and the Priests and the Deacons is not pure in his conscience."

The Holy of Holies is the Sanctuary which is set off from the Nave of the Church by the Iconostasis. Into this most sacred part of the Church only the Priest is allowed to enter and the few acolytes that assist him. Such is the holiness of the Sanctuary that the Iconostasis was placed there in order that we might not even cast our glance on what is Holiest, least of all, step foot into this most sacred part of the temple of worship. It is pitiful when we permit the Sanctuary to serve as a checkroom for hanging coats and hats or a lounge room for chatting.

The Priest alone is permitted to enter into the Sanctuary, because there the expiatory sacrifice of Christ is offered from his own hands. God places him there for the purpose of making the grace of redemption accessible to men. It is enough to behold the Priest standing before the Holy Altar to sense the incomprehensibly lofty and sublime power and dignity of the Priesthood.

In front of the Holy Table is the consecrator of the bread and the wine. Endowed with divine power at his ordination, he changes these earthly elements into the very precious Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, while the choir is intoning: "We praise Thee, we

bless Thee, we thank Thee, O Lord, and we beseech Thee, our God." His priestly lips tremble with awe as he invokes the Holy Spirit: "And make this bread the precious Body of Thy Christ and that which is in this Cup the precious Blood of Thy Christ, changing them by Thy Holy Spirit."

The Prosphoron

A Prosphoron is a round loaf of leavened bread which is brought to the Altar by an Orthodox Christian, as an offering for the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. From this the Priest cuts out a small cube-shaped piece which is placed upon the Paten and consecrated to be offered as the Body of Christ. Other smaller portions are also taken in commemoration of the Blessed Virgin, the Holy Fathers, martyrs, prophets, and saints. Still smaller particles are taken out in remembrance of living and dead friends and relatives.

The most precious offering that should accompany names to be "remembered" at the Altar is the Prosphoron. It is so inexpensive and such a common food item, and yet so priceless and unique once it reaches the Altar. There is no greater honor and privilege for a woman than to prepare with her own hands the bread which will become the Precious Body of Christ at the Divine Liturgy. It is not proper to purchase a Prosphoron from the bakery; nor is it spiritually advantageous for the members of the Church to have it ordered on a regular basis at the bakery by the Church Board or the Priest.

It is the prerogative of the laymen to prepare and to offer the Prosphoron. We must encourage this practice, instead of estranging them from this wonderful blessing. They must not lose the sense of the obligation of making such an offering. It is not fair to deprive them of the spiritual profit that comes with this sacred custom. The lay people must not forget that they have an important share in the Eucharistic worship of the Church. They must not become totally passive in the Liturgy.

It should be remembered that the Prosphoron must be prepared in an Orthodox home with the purest ingredients. The bakery can

never be trusted in this regard. It usually uses for the Prosporon the same dough that it has for the quantity bread intended for public consumption. There is no special effort made for Prosporon, as would happen in a home. Above all, it must be free of all shortening, milk, sugar, and eggs.

The Orthodox housewife will take special care in the preparation of the Prosporon. The very effort and time spent on it will be a source of real, inner satisfaction. In the process of making it, she will reflect on the sacred purpose for which it will be used. It becomes a prayerful undertaking.

Women often prefer to bake their own cakes and pastry. When they are home-baked they are always regarded as superior and of better quality. They should have the same attitude in regard to the Prosporon which is of far more significance. In our modern day when baking bread at home has become a forgotten practice, Orthodox women would do well to show special concern and effort as regards the preparation of the Prosporon. It is a sign of irreverence and indifference when we go to the bakery to obtain what should be the purest and most unadulterated offering for the Altar of Christ. Convenience and expediency must not tempt us.

"Prosporon" itself means "offering" or "gift," because by bringing the Prosporon to Church we make an offering at the Holy Altar. But if it is to be of any merit to us at all, it should be accompanied by two lists of names: of the living and the dead (members of our family, relatives, and friends). They are "remembered" at the Altar during the Sacrifice of the Liturgy: health for the living and sweet repose for the departed souls. Of course, the Priest cannot use every Prosporon for the Host (Body of Christ), if several Prosphora are offered, but he will at least take even a very small portion from each Prosporon, as he "remembers" the names of the living and the departed. Thus each Prosporon serves as our participation in the offering of the Liturgy.

It is a mistake to regard the Prosporon as being beneficial only for the dead in the way a plate of boiled wheat (*coliva*) is when brought to Church. Many people commit the error of thinking that only a list of those departed this life should be brought to the Priest. It is important to know that both the living and the dead are remem-

bered at the Holy Table. Also very often forgotten is the traditional custom of making an offering of sacramental Wine, Incense, and Oil along with the Prosphoron.

In the words of St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, "All Christians, both male and female, ought to offer on all Sundays an offering consisting of bread and wine in order to be released from the bond of their sins by virtue of such sacrifices and offerings and to take diligent care, not only to make these offerings, but also to prepare them with all possible diligence and care from the choicest ingredients they can."

Not only should offerings be choice ones, but those who make the offerings must not be in a state of grave sins. The Canons of the Church are explicit in this regard. The offerings of those living in serious sin are an abomination to God. We must be in a repentful state before approaching the Sanctuary with our gifts. St. Basil teaches us that those who offer God not the best resemble Cain. Not only is their offering unacceptable, but is even accounted a sin, just as God told Cain, "If thou offer aright, but choose not aright, thou has sinned."

It would be spiritually detrimental, were the sacred practice of taking home-baked Prosphora to the Sanctuary to be forgotten. The Church women groups and the youth fellowships could do much in reviving interest in it. They could organize demonstrations how a Prosphoron is made. The following recipe may be helpful:

- 1½ cups of warm water
- 4 to 5 cups of flour
- 1 cake of yeast
- 1 teaspoon of salt
- 1 Prosphoron seal

Dissolve the yeast in the warm water. To this, add the sifted flour and salt; knead until smooth, keeping the dough manageable. Place in a bowl, cover and let rise. When doubled in size, knead once more. Then put dough in cake pan which has been floured only, not greased. Dip the seal in flour and stamp the dough firmly, allowing the seal to remain in stamped position until ready to bake (that is, until dough has again risen to double its size). After it has risen for the second time, remove seal and bake for 30 minutes at 370 degree temperature.

Holy Water

The Church provides many ways for the sanctification of her faithful. Apart from the major seven Sacraments (Baptism, Chrismation, Holy Communion, Absolution, Prayer-Oil, Ordination, and Matrimony) through which redeeming grace is imparted, we have at our disposal the sanctifying grace bestowed upon us through the medium of the Agiasmos (Holy Water). Agiasmos is water blessed by an Orthodox Priest who offers up the traditionally designated prayers for this purpose. Though material in essence, the Holy Water becomes a bearer of the grace of the Holy Spirit and hallows whatever it contacts. Wherever it is exposed it banishes evil spirits and purifies all things from their baneful influence. The Orthodox Christian receives the sanctification of body and soul by drinking of it, by being sprinkled with it, and by having his home sprinkled.

Water can be blessed by the Priest on any day of the year either in the Church or in a home. It is customary to bless water in Church especially on the first day of each month, as a means of starting the new month with the grace of God and securing His divine blessing throughout the month. It is a good practice to invite the Priest to bless the home on the first of every month.

Another traditional custom is to bless a new home into which a family is moving either with the Agiasmos blessed in Church or with a new blessing given in the home. It is a serious omission to fail to have the Priest bless the home into which a family has moved. There is no greater blessing for an Orthodox home than to have it sanctified frequently by the Priest with Holy Water. Health, peace, and happiness are more apt to flourish in a home which is blessed often. These are the gifts of the Holy Spirit imparted by the Holy Water.

When calling the Priest for a house blessing, make certain that you have made the proper preparation. Place a large, deep bowl of water upon a small table preferably in the living room where more space is available for the members of the family and relatives or friends. An icon and a burning candle should be placed behind the bowl. Charcoal with incense should be available in a home censer. Have ready a small cluster of either sweet basil or leafy twigs (not

longer than six inches) tied at the bottom end with cord. This will be used for sprinkling the Holy Water. Prepare a list of the names of those living in the home to be "remembered" by the Priest in the prayers of the service.

In the course of the service the Priest immerses the Cross into the bowl containing the water three times making the sign of the Cross and invoking the descent of the Holy Spirit each time. The contact of the Cross with the water banishes the evil spirits lurking in the water which then becomes an abode of the Holy Spirit. The head of the household is first blessed; then the wife followed by the children in order of age. Relatives and friends follow after. The Priest is then led first to the family shrine where a vigil light should be burning. After blessing it first, he is shown to the other rooms which he sprinkles with the Agiasmos. The remainder of the Agiasmos can be reserved in a bottle for at least a month and then poured in a flower pot or on the ground which is not stepped on either by humans or animals.

Although water can be blessed on any day, there is one special day in the year when the Church observes the Greater Blessing of water, namely, on the Holy Feast of the Theophany (or Epiphany). On this holy day (January 6) we commemorate the descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove upon Jesus, as He was being baptized and upon the waters of the Jordan River. This feast day is the most important one second to Easter and Pentecost. In the ancient Church it was the unique occasion for the baptism of the catechumens who were instructed and prepared to be admitted into the Church. In fact, the practice of using Holy Water originates from the early custom of taking sanctified baptismal water home for a private blessing.

The Holy Water distributed on this day is known as the Greater Blessing (Megas Agiasmos), which should be drunk by those who have kept the fast of the previous day. It is sinful negligence to fail to attend the Divine Liturgy on this day and to drink of the Holy Water, which is placed in bottles and reserved in the family shrines of Orthodox homes throughout the year. Whenever the need arises the Water of the Greater Blessing may be used to sprinkle anyone who may fall ill under the power of evil spirits. Mothers would do

well to use it on their children if they are indisposed before falling asleep.

Each year the Greater Blessing should be renewed on the Feast of the Theophany. The Holy Water that has remained from the previous year can be either poured on the ground around the house where it is not trodden or brought to Church to be poured in the special drain for sanctified waters. The divine power of the Holy Orthodox Church is clearly evident in the fact that Holy Water never becomes corrupt or spoiled. It never loses its freshness regardless of age in contrast with the need of the Roman Church to add salt to blessed water to prevent it from spoiling and taking on a stagnant odor. In fact, frequent renewal of the water is advocated by this Church.

On the eve of the Theophany (January 5) the water which is sanctified is known as the Lesser Blessing (*Micros Agiasmos*). It is essentially of the same significance and character as the Greater Blessing. This, too, is received for sprinkling homes and is drunk with reverence. It is also kept in the home for spiritual and physical ailments.

In smaller parishes where it is practical the Priest usually visits the homes during these holy days and blesses them. It is well to inquire whether your home will be visited. A special request is always an expression of faith and piety. The Priest's visit at this time of the year should be regarded as good fortune and as a unique privilege.

Preparing for Holy Communion

It is not a trivial matter to receive Christ in the Holy Communion. It is an act of great moment. Your soul's eternal welfare depends upon how you approach. Some people receive the Holy Communion worthily and others unworthily. You can receive the forgiveness of your sins and eternal life only if you receive worthily. To approach unworthily is to injure your soul; it is to receive condemnation. The word of God is clear: "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily,

eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's Body."

What constitutes proper preparation? The first step is to examine your conscience. Look over your past since you made your last good Communion. Discover what sins you have committed either by thought, word, or deed.

There are sins of omission as well as of commission. Note what you have also failed to do. Confess what Christian duties you omitted to fulfill. For example, have you neglected your private prayers, attendance at the Divine Liturgy every Sunday, frequent Communion, study of religious literature and especially the Bible, observance of the fasts, and the practice of the virtues of faith, hope, and love? Have you shown sufficient love to your neighbor and to God? Have you visited the sick, those in prison, fed the hungry, dressed the naked, etc.?

Absence from Church constitutes a serious sin. Too many people forget this. According to the sacred canons of the Church, any person who is absent from the Divine Liturgy for three consecutive Sundays is excommunicated. This means he cuts himself off from Christ and His Body, the Church. Canon LXXX of the Sixth Ecumenical Council states: "In case any Bishop, or Priest, or any layman, without any grave necessity or any particular difficulty compelling him to absent himself from his own Church for a very long time, fails to attend Church on Sundays for three consecutive weeks, while being in the city, if he be of the Clergy, let him be deposed from office; but if he be a layman, let him be excommunicated."

It is a serious sin for such a person to receive Holy Communion without first restoring himself to the membership of the Church by receiving the absolution from his Father Confessor. Extended periods of absence should never be taken lightly! It is a mockery of the Holy Communion when certain people come to Church once or twice a year only to receive and never to be seen again. A rare Communion combined with spiritual isolation from the Church is of no benefit to our soul.

Men and women who have engaged in pre-marital or extra-marital sexual intercourse are excluded from the Holy Communion, until they have made the proper penance under the guidance of the

Priest. Men who experience a nocturnal emission the night before, because of a sexually stimulating dream, should put off receiving the Holy Communion to another day. If the emission was simply organic and involuntary, then receiving is permissible.

If you have committed a grave (mortal) sin, by all means never approach the Holy Communion without first making your confession in faith to your Priest. Caution in this regard will save you from God's condemnation. Remember that mortal sin cuts the offender off from the Church however generous a donor he may be. He excommunicates himself and can be restored to the Church only by receiving the absolution from the Priest. The person also who has not forgiven his enemies and those who have offended him must keep away from the Communion. To hold enmity and bitterness against such people makes us unworthy to approach.

The question is often asked: "Must I make my confession to the Priest before each Communion?" There is no one answer that applies to everyone. For some it would be very important to make a confession and for others it would not be necessary. Factors such as frequency of Communion, guarding against grave sin, sincerity of faith and of spiritual effort determine the answer to this question. An enlightened Christian can answer it for himself.

Fastig and Communion

Another very frequent question is: "How long must I fast before receiving Holy Communion?"

Similar determining factors hold true in this regard: (1) frequency of Communion, (2) avoiding grave sin, (3) spirit of humility and repentance, (4) fear of God, faith, and love.

There is no fixed rule as to the number of fasting days for everyone (except for the designated fast days throughout the year). Every individual is a separate case. Usually the gravity of our sins and the rarity of receiving necessitate longer and stricter fasting. The Father Confessor should be consulted in every event.

Fasting must never become an obstacle to frequent Communion.

A good Orthodox observes the fasts during the periods and on the days which the Church has appointed: Fridays and Wednesdays of each week, the 40-day Great Lent, the 40-day Advent, the 15 days preceding the Feast of the Repose of the Blessed Virgin in August, and before the Feast of the Holy Apostles in June.

There is no necessary connection between fasting and Holy Communion. It is possible, for example, for certain individuals to receive Holy Communion on a Sunday without fasting the previous day (Saturday), providing the Wednesday and Friday fasts are observed. The more frequent one receives the less fasting is required. It is not the fact of receiving the Holy Communion that requires fasting, but rather the extent and degree of repentance for sins committed since the last Communion.

A good Orthodox receives the Holy Communion each time he attends the Divine Liturgy. Unwarranted fasting must never stand in the way of frequent Communion. As a matter of fact, we commit a serious sin whenever we fail to receive the Communion when present at the Divine Liturgy. It is just as sinful not to receive, when we very easily could with a bit of effort and concern, as it is to receive, when we should not, due to the lack of adequate faith and preparation.

The Holy Communion is not a reward for our virtue and holiness. It is the medicine for our spiritual weakness; it is the drug for our inner imperfection. Because we are sinners we need Jesus Christ as often as possible. It is sincere faith and repentance — not perfection — that makes us worthy for frequent Communion. If we really thirst for Christ, how can we truly afford to refuse His weekly invitation? "With the fear of God, faith, and love draw near!" are words directed to us by Christ at each Divine Liturgy and not only on Easter and Christmas. It is sinful negligence to put off Communion for the high holy days. It is to hold a perverted conception of the very purpose and meaning of the Sacrament of Holy Communion. To receive only four times a year is the bare minimum; it is not the norm of a good Orthodox Christian.

The cause of most of spiritual mediocrity is failure to receive Jesus Christ frequently in the Holy Communion. Parish life cannot prosper spiritually and materially when receiving the Communion

becomes a rarity. Unity, love, peace, and generous giving are fruits of the Holy Spirit acquired only in partaking of frequent Communion. Nothing could be more irreverent and offensive to God than to have not even one person approach when the Priest faces the congregation and calls: "With the fear of God, faith, and love draw near!" It is pitiful also to see only newly baptized infants carried to the Communion Chalice, whereas the adults that carry them have more need of spiritual nourishment. It would be a blessing for a godfather and godmother to receive when the child is brought to the altar for its Communion. Mere consistency of faith and practice would compel this.

Communion Prayers

A necessary part of adequate preparation for receiving Holy Communion is the reading of the Preparation Prayers which can be found in any of the available Orthodox prayer books. There is also available a special Communion Prayer Book. No Orthodox Christian can do without the Communion Prayers. They help us express our repentance and faith, as we converse with our Lord prior to receiving Him at the Altar. They predispose us inwardly before approaching the Holy of Holies. We can have greater assurance that we have received worthily after first offering up to God our humble adoration and self-abasement.

Saturday evening in the Orthodox Church marks an introduction to the Sabbath day. It is our duty to attend the Vesper service at Church and to pass the remainder of the evening in the study and meditation of God's Love. Reading some of the Communion Prayers before retiring helps to collect one's thoughts in a disposition of reverence. It is not proper to spend the evening before Communion at gala affairs, at movies, or other entertaining functions. A quiet evening will help us make a better Communion the following morning.

In the morning the remainder of the Communion Prayers should be read some upon arising from sleep and others at the Communion Hymn of the Divine Liturgy. The last few prayers should be said

just before receiving. We can carry our Prayer Book with us to the Altar. As we stand in line awaiting our turn to receive, our mind should be absorbed in prayer with sentiments of repentance and self-abasement. The closer we draw to Christ, the more fervent our faith and the greater our awe and fear should be. "O Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me a sinner and save me!" should be repeatedly said to oneself at this stage of one's preparation. The sign of the Cross is the final expression of one's contrition before opening the mouth and placing the Communion cloth under the chin.

As soon as you receive, sponge your lips lightly with the red cloth so that no excess Communion remains on the lips. Take a piece of the antidoron, which is usually in a tray near the Priest, and eat it to wash down the Communion particles that may have adhered to the teeth or tongue. It is important to hold the cloth with both hands under the chin so that if any of the Communion spills it will not fall to the floor or on our clothing. Due caution should be taken in order not to desecrate the Precious Sacraments through any accident. In the event any of the Communion spills on our clothing the garment should be burned as soon as possible. Parents should be careful when holding their infant children in their arms for Communion lest any of it be forced out of the mouth through crying or spitting. They should make certain that it has been swallowed. Turning a child's face against our shoulder should be avoided, because the lips are moistened with the Communion which might wipe off on our clothing. The child should be held upright after Communion. Pinching the nose of the baby is always helpful in making it swallow the Communion.

It is a great irreverence to leave the Church immediately upon receiving Christ in the Holy Communion. Make certain you read the Thanksgiving Prayers which directly follow the Preparation Prayers. Return to your seat and express your gratitude to the Lord for granting you His Mercy and Love. Never leave the Church until you have finished your prayers. Join the choir in exclaiming with all your heart: "We have seen the true Light! We have received the Heavenly Spirit! . . ."

Whenever the Communion is received, there is no need to obtain the antidoron at the close of the Liturgy in line with those who have not communicated and who now receive the antidoron as a substi-

tute for the Holy Communion. Needless returning to the antidoron line is a waste of time and a duplication of effort both for the communicant and for the Priest.

During the remainder of the day spitting should be avoided, because the mouth is hallowed and purpled with the Precious Blood of Christ. The saliva is still sanctified. Brushing the teeth should be put off until the following morning. Before retiring it is a good practice again to thank the Lord for the grace of receiving Him in the Divine Liturgy.

Whenever you are in doubt with regard to the adequacy of your preparation, feel free to seek the advice of your Priest. Never hesitate to approach him and to disclose the innermost thoughts of your heart to him. Discuss with him your spiritual weaknesses with frankness and humility.

It is impossible to practice your faith in a manner pleasing to God without putting yourself under the close guidance of your spiritual Father. It is to him that you must reveal your inner self, since God uses him as an instrument of His forgiving grace. Self-reliance in the spiritual life can lead into error and self-deception.

A very laudable custom, which should be preserved in the family, is kissing the hand of the parents by the son or daughter before receiving the Holy Communion with the humble request: "Forgive me, mother (or dad)." It is usually done in the evening before retiring. The mother can train the child to kiss the father's hand, while the father can remind the child of its duty to the mother. This traditional practice shows forth both respect for parents and conscientiousness in preparing for the sacred and awesome moment. If this is a good habit in relation to our natural father and mother, how much more imperative is it to show the same expression of respect and humility to the Priest who is our Father in Christ, especially if we have allowed ourselves to feel uncharitably toward him or have spoken carelessly about him.

To forgive and seek forgiveness from our fellow believer is of utmost importance for a good Communion, while pride which fails to forgive and refuses to seek forgiveness will cause great harm to our immortal soul at Communion time. What a wonderful act of obedience to Christ when Christian brethren can kiss each other in

the traditional fashion before Holy Communion, as a manifestation of forgiving and being forgiven!

Women and Holy Communion

The consensus of the Holy Fathers of the Church teaches us that it is irreverent for a woman who is passing through her menstruation period to receive the Holy Communion. In the language of the Fathers and Saints, menstruation is "uncleanness" and the woman having it is "unclean."

These two words are taken from the Old Testament where menstruation is viewed with a negative attitude. For example, we read: "Any woman that is running with blood and whose flux shall be in her body shall remain seated separately [from other people] for seven days. Anyone that touches her shall be unclean until evening" (Lev. 15:19). Another instance of such aversion is in the following passage: "And if a man shall lie with a woman having her sickness and shall uncover her nakedness, he hath discovered her fountain, and she hath uncovered the fountain of her blood and both of them shall be exterminated from amongst their generation" (Lev. 20:18).

Our first reaction might be one of dismay at such an unsympathetic and callous view of what is simply a natural process in the human female. However, if we remember that medical hygiene was an integral part of religion in the Jewish tradition, we can understand such restrictions. The cleanliness and health of the body was the essential concern and responsibility of religion. Hence, such other practices as circumcision and abstaining from pork. All such precepts aimed at preserving the health of the body and sought the prevention of disease originating from carelessness in keeping the body clean. The priests, for example, were those who pronounced a leper healed and cleansed from leprosy. The Jewish Law called strict attention to the importance of sanitation in every aspect and expression of human life, whether it be in eating or in sexual activity.

The Christian Church did not discard these injunctions of the

Old Testament as completely useless and obsolete. Only certain extremes in the exclusion of menstruating women from human fellowship is opposed by the Holy Fathers. They stress that menstruation is only a biological process instituted by God. St. John Chrysostom observes: "These things are not truly sin nor uncleanness."

To take a few more examples, St. Theodore holds that "no natural biological occurrence is truly unclean." St. Theodore states: "There is nothing unclean except a wicked disposition." In the Apostolic Injunctions (VI, 26) we read: "Neither lawful intercourse, nor childbed, nor issue of blood, nor nocturnal emission can pollute a human being's nature or separate him from the Holy Spirit, but only impiety and an unlawful act."

From the Orthodox Christian standpoint, therefore, it is not proper to exclude a menstruous woman from religious fellowship to the extremes that we find in the Jewish Law of the Old Testament. However, in the case of receiving the Holy Communion it has been a historical tradition for menstruous women to abstain. St. Augustine, for example, teaches that such women simply out of reverence should postpone their Communion. The woman who practices frequent Communion does not find it disturbing or inconvenient. This is a further reason for avoiding rare Communions.

It is for this reason that a mother is prohibited from receiving the Communion for forty days following childbirth. On the fortieth day she makes her first entry into the temple of worship where she is blessed by the Priest. Indeed, such a mother should make it a point to receive the Holy Communion at the time of purification, as an expression of thanksgiving to the Lord.

It should also be noted that women that are menstruous cannot receive Holy Baptism. Extremes in avoiding the sacred, however, are unwarranted, as, for example, refraining from going to Church, kissing icons, receiving the antidoron, etc.

Sex and Marriage

To enter a Christian marriage is part of living the life of obedience to the will of God. Yet, too often marriage is regarded as un-

related to our Christian commitment. The religious aspect of marriage is taken as an afterthought or as a mere formal requirement to be fulfilled just for the sake of the parents or out of social convention. This is often caused by the fact that very frequently marriage comes unexpectedly or as a sudden result of accidental circumstances. It catches many young people unprepared.

Every young man and woman should think of marriage seriously upon reaching the age of 18 or 20, whether it is desired and planned remotely or immediately. This holds true especially for girls who usually get married at a younger age than men. A good Christian takes marriage as a sacred institution established by God in the beginning of creation and hallowed by Christ in the New Dispensation of His Death and Resurrection.

Every girl that adheres to Christian Truth looks forward prayerfully to the joyful day when through wedlock she might find her true self-fulfillment in motherhood. The Bible teaches us that "woman is saved by child bearing." Unless a girl is called to a higher vocation of monastic dedication, it is her duty to regard marriage as her purpose in life. A girl who has faith prays earnestly for a happy marriage. She preserves her virginity in humble obedience to the will of God and trusts in the loving providence of God as the response to fervent prayer.

Talking over the religious implications of marriage should not be put off as the least important consideration. This holds true particularly as regards mixed marriages. Love regarded in separation from God is unreliable and subject to fluctuation. Unshakable and abiding love between a husband and wife is the result of a common devotion to the eternal Truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Mutual love which is nourished by faith in God is deep and lasting, while the love that stems from mere erotic attraction is short-lived and powerless to withstand the tests of adversities.

A marriage that has not been blessed in the Orthodox Church is not valid and the Orthodox spouse involved is excluded from the Holy Communion and from the redeeming life of the Church. He or she forfeits the grace of God and all the privileges of membership in the Church. Matrimony is more than a natural and civil institution involving just nature and legal proceedings. Mutual con-

sent and a civil license do not go to make a valid marriage. Something more is required. Since marriage is a holy sacrament, it must be blessed by the Bishop or a Priest who has been licensed by the Archbishop to solemnize the marriage.

When two people have decided upon marriage, they must consult with their Priest as soon as possible. The Priest will direct and guide them as to what procedure to follow for their Orthodox marriage. He will counsel them in the Christian meaning of marriage. The application for the Archbishop's license will be filled and signed by the Priest who is to be the officiant. A second form is filled out which serves as a declaration certifying that the two persons to be married have never had a previous marriage. This form is signed by the future bride and groom, two witnesses, and the Priest. Both forms are required in order for the Church license to be issued. Without the license from the Archbishop the Priest is prohibited from blessing the marriage.

It was the custom in the Early Church to administer the Holy Communion to the couple during the marriage service, since it was connected with the Divine Liturgy directly. Inasmuch as this is no longer the practice, the engaged couple can arrange to receive the Holy Communion at the morning Liturgy of the day of the marriage or some time as close to the wedding day as possible. They should make their Confession to the Priest in advance. With such spiritual preparation an engaged couple prove their conviction in the sacred character of matrimony. They make a truly Christian beginning to a married life that will be truly Christian throughout the very end.

The bride and groom are crowned with wreaths by the Priest as an expression of honor and glory which the Church bestows upon them. They are a reward given to them for preserving their virginity and exercising self-control to the day of their marriage and a prefiguring of the heavenly crowns of unfading glory to be received in God's eternal Kingdom for living the life of Christian virtue.

The marital crowns are regarded as sacred in the Orthodox Church. It is for this reason that they are kissed at the end of the wedding by the Priest, the parents, and well-wishers.

After the marriage they should be saved by the newly-weds, reverently framed, and kept on the bedroom wall as a constant reminder

of the sacredness and indissolubility of the marital bond. It is irreverent and most regrettable to see newly-weds dispose of them as if they meant nothing to them. There are special round frames available for marital crowns and can be found with a little effort. Indeed they make excellent wedding gifts which either parents or the best man can give to the newly married couple. The practice of framing the crowns and placing them in a conspicuous place in the bedroom should be faithfully observed. It is one of the most meaningful symbolisms of faith within the household which deserves to be perpetuated and not forgotten and lost.

Sex and Youth

Man's total nature attains fulfillment only when it functions as the Creator had intended. Ultimate happiness results only when man conforms to the plan and will of God. To conflict with the Divine will is to invite regret and sorrow.

The physical organs, as well as the intellectual endowments of man, must be used to fulfill the purpose for which they were created. This means that the sex drive finds its legitimate usefulness in Christian Matrimony. It serves the creative purposes of God when indulged between man and wife joined together by the sacramental bond of Holy Matrimony. All sexual indulgence apart from the married state is morally and spiritually condemnable. To abuse the sexual drive is to disobey the will of God and to commit a moral offence.

Until the time of marriage a Christian young man and woman strives to practice the virtue of chastity. This means that the sex drive is kept under control; Christian continence becomes the guiding rule. With proper Christian upbringing and the cultivation of Christian values a child will grow to ward off temptations of the flesh.

When a boy or a girl has been raised in a home where Christ is recognized as Master and Christian teachings are part of daily living, sex will find its proper Christian expression. Curbing the sex drive will be only a normal and natural part of clean Christian

living. It is not an insuperable challenge to exercise self-control in this regard when the child has developed into an integrated Christian personality.

A child that has learned to love God and to find joy in obedience to His will regards it as no overwhelming difficulty to live a pre-marital life of moral purity. The parental guidance in this respect is a determining factor. It is futile for parents to demand purity of their children and moral discipline, when they make it an outwardly imposed law which has no inner connection with the total personality. Regard for God's law should become the very atmosphere in which a child grows and matures—not an isolated injunction. A moral imperative must be a natural expression of faith in Christ—not an abstract ethical standard appearing to the child as an arbitrary demand of authoritarian parents. Parents would suffer less disappointments were they to rear their children from early childhood in the fear of God and commitment to Christ as a loving Redeemer.

This does not mean that the boy or girl that was less fortunate, being deprived of Christian upbringing, is exempt from God's law and judgment. In such a case God's empowering grace is made available to those who must exert themselves spiritually in a more intense way than others. Faith in God brings a transforming and regenerating power to the human heart to such a degree that no matter how deeply rooted our moral weakness may be it can be overcome. "What is impossible through man is possible through God," our Lord reassures us.

Temptations of the flesh cannot be resisted without the help of the grace that comes from God. Without God's helping hand any man becomes easy prey to the Devil and all machinations of our physical drives. "Without me ye can do nothing," Christ teaches us.

It is vain to expect to preserve Christian chastity without turning to regular prayer that rises from a sincerely believing heart. Young people can strengthen their will against the enticements of the flesh by sharing frequently in the sacramental life of the Church. By receiving the Holy Communion as often as possible and by practicing daily prayer, they can be certain that carnal temptations—as overwhelming as they may seem—will never succeed in subduing their

souls and bodies. Temptations are natural and we cannot be free from them. They serve to put our faith to a test and help us develop spiritually. Each time we triumph against temptation we grow stronger in spiritual stature. We need not be disturbed by the constant presence of temptations, as long as we are equipped with faith in God which arms and shields us from the darts of Satan.

Pre-marital sexual intercourse is usually called "fornication" in the language of the Church. It is a moral violation which transgresses the law of God. "Keep away from fornication," the Bible declares to us. "Fornicators, adulterers . . . shall not inherit the Kingdom of God" is a further warning stated in Holy Scripture and is directed to widows and widowers, as well, who must guard their Christian chastity by exercising continence. To indulge in such carnal intercourse is to commit a grave sin which causes unhappiness. Only sincere repentance and absolution received from the Priest can reinstate the guilty person to the Church. Above all it is spiritually harmful to receive the Holy Communion under such circumstances, that is, without first having made a Confession to the Priest for forgiveness.

It is only natural that avoiding the occasion for sin averts the possibility of committing a sin. Whatever stimulates the sex drive must be avoided. Young people, for example, should avoid viewing lewd pictures and sexually provocative movies. They should not read books that arouse the sex drives and stimulate the imagination concerning sexual activity. "Dirty jokes" and light sex talking also can only do young people spiritual damage. It is sinfully inconsistent to lead ourselves into temptation, while we pray to God our Father to "lead us not into temptation."

Youth and Dating

Close intimacy that grows out of an increasing friendship between a girl and a boy is to be distrusted, since it can lead to physical contact which jeopardizes the moral purity of both. In this light it is obvious that to have a "steady date" is morally risky and can lead

to unhappy consequences. Caution in this regard must be exercised by every boy and girl that has even the most elementary acquaintance with the biology of sex.

The question is often asked: "Does the Orthodox Church approve of the practice of dating?"

Insofar as dating creates an intimate relationship between a boy and a girl which is premature in terms of marital intentions and marital preparedness, dating is a moral evil and should be avoided. When dating is carried on with the purpose of meeting a prospective spouse for marriage, it can obviously serve a purpose providing no pre-marital sexual activity is entered in. All extra-marital sexual intercourse is a moral offence in the eyes of God and the Church.

The Church advocates the social mingling of boys and girls in a group setting. An extended association carried on between a boy and a girl in private deprives both of the chance to grow in social experience and also entails moral perils. It is preferable for young men and women to meet and socialize in groups rather than coupling-up in private. Mutual attraction between a boy and a girl is no justification for an intimate, exclusive relationship when the thought of marriage is remote or out of the question either because of age or of educational or occupational circumstances.

Dating before the age of 18 draws the boy or girl away from the home. It does not give young people the opportunity to share fully in family experiences and often family unity is lost. Premature dating breaks children away from family life. Children have much to gain when they are able to experience joys and sorrows within the family setting. Wholesome attachment to parents, as well as to the brothers or sisters even during adolescence is forfeited when children turn out to be mere "roomers" and "boarders" in their own home. The home should be more than the place to sleep and have meals. It must be the basic unit of communal life, a truly Christian community which provides children with adequate preparation for creating a new Christian, family community.

Dating can encroach severely on the close-knitted character of family life. It has created conflicts within the family, ill-feelings, tensions, and frustrations. Parent-child relationship has often been upset. Family unity weakens considerably when children just room

and board in their homes because of activities outside the home created by frequent dating and romances. Little room remains in their hearts and minds for family activities and family experiences. Yet, in later life nothing can be fonder and more heart-warming than pleasant memories of early life with mother and father, as well as with brothers and sisters.

Young people with Christian convictions should seek company with each other in Church fellowship groups. In the shadow of the Church they can share in group activities in the name of Christ. Boys and girls will find in Church associations wholesome Christian social life where they learn to have fun together in a Christ-centered perspective. They can enjoy each other's friendship in group endeavors sponsored by the Church. Only within the framework of the Church can they find the recreation and social self-fulfillment that is well-pleasing to God and conducive to the development of Christian character. Under the guidance of the Priest, who is their spiritual Father, young people can grow in the fuller understanding of joy in Christian fellowship without affecting their full participation in their family life.

The Use of Contraceptives

The sex drive finds its legitimate gratification and its true end in holy wedlock. Only then does it become the expression of the deeper, inner union between man and wife. Their mutual love which has come under the sanctifying blessing of God and the Church is consummated in the sexual act which is sacred and creative. Both become hallowed instruments of God's creative power by bringing children into the world.

Sexual intercourse in marriage fulfills the profound physical and emotional need with which every man and woman is created by God. It becomes the crowning expression of mutual love between the spouses. It is a sacred act when carried on within the state of marriage, because it serves a need with which God has fashioned man.

But sexual intercourse remains sacred only so long as it is not

intentionally disassociated from its natural consequence, the conception of a child. As soon as sexual intercourse is made to serve only the physical gratification of the spouses, then it ceases to be a sacred and unselfish act. When sexual delight wilfully becomes an end in itself, then the purpose of marriage becomes perverted. It is an act of defiance against the will of God.

When childbirth is unwanted and refused, then sexual intercourse becomes a selfish act, instead of a sacrificial act of conjugal love. The purpose of marriage is mutual self-fulfillment related directly to the procreation of children. To prevent the conception of children by artificial means and by the use of drugs is a selfish act which constitutes a moral offence in the sight of Almighty God. The use of contraceptives is totally unacceptable from the standpoint of the Orthodox Church. The only lawful means of birth control is sexual abstinence.

Occasional abstinence from sexual intercourse which can be observed by mutual consent is normative in the lives of married couples who wish to conform to the teachings of the Christian Faith. Fast days are always days of sexual abstinence, particularly on the evening preceding the receiving of the Holy Communion. This kind of spiritual discipline should have an important part in the Christian life of a married couple. Gluttony in sexual intercourse is just as sinful as gluttony in eating and drinking. Over-indulgence in both can lead to spiritually and physically harmful consequences. Sexual abstinence coupled with fervent faith and prayer need never appear to be insuperable.

In the Encyclical of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece (signed by fifty-five Bishops), dated October 1937, we have an official expression of the Orthodox position. It states unequivocally that "the tradition of the Church that descends from apostolic times is uniquely consistent in teaching that the prevention of child-bearing is an unlawful act and premeditated resistance of man against the will of God. . . . Self-restraint constitutes the only legitimate means for married couples in avoiding the procreation of children when truly necessary."

Under such circumstances selfishness is the motivating factor — more often in the woman who is to be burdened with the task of caring for children as a full-time responsibility in the home. Newly-

weds may be concerned only with "having fun" for a while before "settling down" and raising children.

In other instances occupational or professional pursuits may leave no thoughts for bearing children. Both the husband and the wife become absorbed in gaining advancement in their professional fields and dismiss the thought of children for the indefinite future. Making money together becomes the primary goal of their married life. Marriage deteriorates into a kind of commercial partnership.

Both cases constitute a flagrant violation of the sacred meaning of marriage. It should be stressed that many married women have regretted for putting off childbirth to later years when they were unable to have children for a variety of reasons. Punishment from God may come in many unexpected ways.

There have been married women who have also regretted for having only one or two children whereas they could have had more. We must remember that there is no absolute guarantee that the one or two children will remain part of the family. Their lives are in the hands of God. Children are always exposed to countless dangers that imperil their health and lives particularly in the course of their early growth. Nothing could be more heart-rending than the picture of a mother who has lost her one and only child.

Moreover, parents are liable to disappointments as regards the spiritual, psychological, and intellectual development of their children. It is always comforting for parents who suffer such disappointments with one or more children to enjoy the progress of the other children in the family.

It is obvious, therefore, that many children are a blessing from God. To restrict the number of children betrays again an element of selfishness. More than one or two children are either "too much trouble" or a financial liability. These reasons indicate clearly a selfish indolence and a lack of a Christian spirit of sacrificial love, respectively.

How ironic when couples that are able to bear children refuse childbirth and those that wish to have children are unable to bear them! But then there is always a purpose to whatever befalls man when faith in a loving God fills and sustains the soul. Nothing hap-

pens by chance to a married couple that is committed to doing the will of God. Inability to bear children is just as much a test of unselfishness and self-sacrifice as bearing children. Adoption is another way of having children — indeed it is a more meritorious manner of receiving children from God. There are always orphans and other children without parents who are waiting to be adopted by childless couples. God's rewarding grace will be theirs in great abundance. It is a serious sin of omission for a childless couple to show indifference and negligence in adopting children.

... Let No Man Put Asunder

Jesus Christ elevated marriage to sacred and divine heights. The marital bond has been hallowed and exalted to the level of the relationship of Christ and the Church which is His Mystical Bride. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery and I take it to mean Christ and the Church" (Eph. 5:31, 32).

The husband and wife are just as inseparable as Christ and the Church. The relationship is similar. The husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the Church. Even as the Church is subject to Christ, so in like manner the wife is subject to the husband in all things. "And let the wife see that she respects her husband." Such is the teaching of the Word of God found in Scripture. On the other hand, the husband's love for the wife must be similar to Christ's love for the Church. It must be a sacrificial love. "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her."

Thus, harmony in marital relations is possible in the infinite Wisdom of God only in the balance between the respect and subjection of the wife to her husband and the sacrificial love of the husband for his wife. Such a harmonious relationship stemming from the very structure of the nature of man and woman and re-affirmed by our

Blessed Lord is subverted by the lack of faith in Christ and the sinful disobedience to God's will.

A disruption of marital harmony often leads to permanent separation and divorce. According to the Christian teachings of the Gospel, the marital bond is indissoluble. The Bible tells us: "Whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder." Only death can break the union of man and wife. No power on earth should interfere to separate husband and wife that God has united in holy wedlock.

Strictly speaking, therefore, divorce is unacceptable in the Orthodox Church. It is granted only in rare cases where continued cohabitation of two married people could result in disaster. In such a case the proper form is filled out by the Priest who submits it to the Archbishop. Both spouses involved are summoned to appear before a Church tribunal which makes the final decision. Only when divorce papers are issued by the Archbishop are the spouses regarded as truly separated and no longer as husband and wife. The civil divorce alone affects in no way the marital status of the spouses. A second marriage cannot be entered in unless the Church divorce is obtained.

A spouse who truly has been inwardly regenerated in Christ will never entertain the thought of divorce, despite what afflictions are suffered as a result of the faults of the other spouse. Such possible hardships are borne patiently in obedience to God by Whose concession they occur. They are to be regarded as a test of faith, patience, and loyalty. A spouse who is consistent with his or her commitment to Christ will bear all things out of regard for the sacredness and indissolubility of Christian marriage.

A Christian marriage can never be accepted as a permanent state only insofar as the one spouse makes life pleasant for the other. This would give a very uncertain and unstable character to marriage and the marital union would always be essentially conditional. To resign oneself to the indissoluble nature of marriage lends strength and hope and determination in times of tension and strained relations. Forbearance under such circumstances is made possible by deepening one's faith and by increasing the frequency and fervor of prayer. Without turning to divine grace which comes from God,

weak and sinful nature will then take its course. "What is impossible through man is possible through God," is the re-assurance of the revealed Word. To bear and forbear the shortcomings of the other spouse merits the greater reward especially in the eternal life of God's blessed Kingdom.

Married couples should speak with their Priest long before the final decision is made for divorce. If they go to him with their marital problems early enough, there is always the chance of seeing their conflicts in a new light that leads to re-evaluation and readjustment. The Priest, as a spiritual father and guide, will always offer counsel and the opportunity of re-estimating each other's faults.

Can't Get Married

In the event a young woman fails to get married, despite her many prayers that have ascended to the Heavenly Throne above, she must humbly accept that it is God's will for her to seek a higher purpose in life apart from that of merely existing and working to support herself. A life of unselfish service to Christ and His Church may be her real calling. She may be given the sign of a vocation to the monastic life. If it is not the monastic life to which she is called, it is a life above and beyond simply existing alone for one's own self. Happy is the woman that has discovered her real calling under such circumstances.

Financial independence, however, which a young unmarried woman enjoys, accounts for the attitude: "I don't care if I can't get married," or "It doesn't bother me if no one has asked to marry me." Such feigned independence essentially expresses a deep-rooted bitterness which does not leave room for the feeling of Christian responsibility and the sense of Christian vocation.

Nothing happens fortuitously in our life when we fervently believe that God governs the course of our earthly pilgrimage. It is our obligation to discover the meaning and purpose of whatever happens in our life's journey, whether pleasant or unpleasant. Nothing is accidental in the life of a humbly believing Christian. Failure

to get married, as well as actual marriage, must be seen in the light of God's unfailing providence and of what He proposes for us.

The unmarried or celibate state of Christian living is the offering up to God of personal virginity as a sweet-smelling sacrifice. The life of virginity consecrated to God is far more sublime and deserving of far more merit and reward than the married state. In such a life the sexual drive is kept under control and sublimated, since sexual intercourse outside of holy wedlock is illicit and sinful. Any kind of sexual impurity either of thought or action is a moral offense. Such a life of complete mortification need not be one of frustration and disappointment. Throughout the centuries of the history of the Church there have been countless young men and women who have consecrated their lives totally to Christ. How great their eternal reward in the Kingdom of Heaven!

If it is not a genuine, monastic vocation to which an unmarried woman is called, it might be a glorious calling to active service in the teaching and instructive ministry of the Church, as well as to the evangelical work of social welfare. An unmarried or celibate life can prove to be most fruitful only if lived in dedication to God in whatever area of the Church He calls.

It is pitiful to see a large number of unmarried women in the Church who lead spiritually idle and unfruitful lives. They usually content themselves with a good-paying office job and good-sized wardrobe. A few of them become active in women's church organizations. This is an excellent area for Christian service, but it is not enough. A deeper sense of purpose within the Church is needed.

Social activity does not adequately fill the spiritual emptiness of unmarried life. Only a more profound spiritual awareness of life's meaning is ultimately rewarding and self-fulfilling. The Roman and Protestant Churches have thousands of young women who serve with missionary zeal both at home and abroad in the cause of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If only our own Orthodox young women would lead fruitful lives both for the benefit of the Church and for the sake of winning a more glorious crown of blessedness in God's eternal Kingdom!

Funerals

When death strikes in a family, usually we are caught unprepared. Very often the magnitude of the sorrow prevents us from thinking clearly and planning correctly in the Christian sense. Funeral directors have made burials such involved affairs that bereaved relatives seldom realize what the place of religious practice and faith is under such circumstances.

A good Christian responds to the death of a beloved person with sorrow that is moderated with the Christian conviction that death is a passing to another life—not an extinction of life. The funeral arrangements are made with a Christian attitude and a reverent regard for the Church's precepts.

The Priest should be consulted immediately and the day of the funeral can be planned in order to convenience primarily the Priest who has numerous other commitments in the parish. It is neither courteous nor fair to make demands of the Priest as regards the day and hour of the funeral service and to practice any arbitrary custom.

Cherishing the memory of their beloved one makes the bereaved persons usually over-sensitive in such times of mourning. They are often apt to behave in a way which leads to unpleasant moments. But there is no excuse for adding irritability and resentment to sorrow. The Priest's counselling should be followed closely and the funeral director must be requested to co-ordinate his plans with the decisions of the Priest who is to officiate at the funeral.

A good Christian family spends money with moderation for a funeral. Extravagance satisfies only the pride of the family; it does no good to the departed soul. We benefit our beloved dead only by giving of our money to the needy and by making an offering for the ministry of the Church.

At the moment of death the soul departs from the body which is its tabernacle. The body is what "remains" of the once-living person after the soul makes its exit. It is a Christian belief that the dead body of a Christian believer should be treated with reverence. It is buried with the conviction that it will rise at the second coming of Christ according to His unfailing promise, just as the body of Christ arose on the third day.

The "remains" are regarded with due care, because the body has been sanctified along with the soul by Baptism, Confirmation, and the Precious Body and Blood of Christ. The body has served as the "temple of the Holy Spirit" according to the teaching of the Bible. Hence, the practice of venerating and kissing the relics of the saints whose lives were consumed in devotion to Christ. Their "remains" are holy, because they have been hallowed by the purity, virtue, and spiritual attainment that come with obedience to Christ. It is for this reason that the relics of certain saints miraculously have given off a fragrant aroma and have worked miraculous cures.

In the light of this teaching of the Church it is obvious that cremation of the body is unacceptable and the individual who insists upon it either for his ownself or for others commits a serious offense in the eyes of God.

The custom of keeping the body for a prolonged period of time before burial is an abuse which a good Orthodox should avoid. It indicates more a pagan, rather than a Christian, frame of mind. We must remember that the body is not the personality of the individual who is dead. It is only what remains of him. The personality is transferred to God to be judged, while the body is the dust which returns to dust, according to the pronouncement of the Creator.

To parade the body around and to turn it into a public exhibit is improper. When a person dies, the body should be buried as soon as possible. The earth is the only resting place for the remains. More time can be devoted to praying for the repose of the departed soul than for viewing the dead body. Moreover, keeping the body unburied is an irritation to the wound which death inflicts on the bereaved family. But there is also a subtle illusion that a quick lowering of the body into the ground shows disregard to the deceased and lack of love. This is why more than one night of waking is usually uncalled for. Wakes have degenerated into "so-cials" which have become almost unrelated to the deceased.

It is preferable to keep the casket closed at the cemetery. To open it again is to simply irritate the fresh wound of grief in the heart of the family.

Funeral receptions that turn into lavish restaurant dinners or gala affairs usually serve family pride. Modest gatherings preferably in

the home without heavy eating and drinking are more becoming to the occasion. Expensive receptions have necessitated the regrettable custom of extending invitations to a limited number of friends. Spontaneous Christian expression is preferable to formality on such occasions. The purpose of visiting the home of a bereaved family is to comfort those in mourning out of Christian love.

The Resurrection of the Dead

Since death made its entrance with the disobedience of our first parents, the God of love and mercy had been preparing for the defeat of its power. The infinite wisdom of the Creator could conceive of the best plan of securing the victory of life over death without revoking at the same time His sentence of death. He established this victory through the sacrifice of His Incarnate Son. It was by death that death was to be vanquished.

The death of Christ annihilated death. He died that "mortality might be swallowed up of life." In dying He has made mortal man immortal and incorrupt. He suppressed the power of corruption and crushed the dominion of Satan. The obedience of Christ to His Heavenly Father led Him as far as Hades. "He went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah." He came upon earth to save Adam, but not finding him, He descended into the terrestrial depths of Hades. There the New Adam sought out the First Adam. There He descended alone only to ascend finally into Heaven along with those who had fallen from God's grace. Although He died in His human nature, He lives as God by having triumphed over death and the Devil through His glorious Resurrection.

Christ's victory which began in Hades reaches its completion in His rising from the grave the third day. His triumph was sealed with His victorious Resurrection. "He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might free all things." By rising from the dead, Christ drew all men to Himself

and shared His glorified humanity with us by incorporating us into His Body, the Church, and by making us co-heirs with Himself of eternal incorruption and blessedness. "When He ascended upon high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men."

Christ is the inclusive representative of humanity. In Him all men suffer and die, but all rise also in the life of divine glory and victory. In Holy Baptism we are buried with Christ unto death and as Christ was raised by the glory of the Father, even so we also will rise, "for if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." To die this death mystically is never to die again because he who dies is justified from sin. "Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him." Likewise, death has no more dominion over us, for by His death we were released from the bondage of death and corruption.

Death is no longer a penalty, but "rather a way of escape from the evil of the world" in the words of St. Augustine. Death becomes the instrument of life to those who trust in the Redeemer. The Old Pascha (Passover) is succeeded by the New Pascha. It is the New Pascha (Easter) that has opened the way to the new and true Land of Promise where there flows milk and honey for ever and ever. The mighty act of God has restored His Chosen People. They have been let out of the Egypt of sin and spiritual enslavement to the land of unspeakable joy. Through death and resurrection the New Israel has come into being out of the Old Israel. The whole world rejoices, bathed in the radiance of the Resurrection light and hallowed in the efficacious power of glory.

With the rising of Christ in the New Pascha, the emergence of the New People of God becomes a reality. The Heavenly Wedding takes place, because "As a Bridegroom He comes forth from the tomb as from the Wedding Chamber." The generation of the new race of men begins. Man, once the "child of wrath," becomes the child of God.

The Resurrection of Christ is not an incident isolated in history. It is a present reality in the life of the Church. The Church continually appropriates to herself the fruits of the Resurrection in the celebration of the Eucharistic offering. In her central act of worship

she perpetually enters into the glory of the Resurrection renewing her indentity with Him Who has drawn His Chosen People to Himself in His glory. Each time the Divine Liturgy is celebrated we are united anew to the glorious life of Christ's Resurrection and reassured of sharing in His triumph for eternity. Each time we receive of His Precious Body and Blood we re-enter into the divine life of incorruption and glory.

Every Sunday is an Easter Sunday. To partake of the Holy Communion is to unite with the Risen Christ in His glorified humanity and divinity. It is to renew the "newness of life" which begins with Holy Baptism. We re-live the Resurrection joy which is the gift granted to those who have surrendered their lives to Christ. Our own resurrection is no longer an event of the future. It is a reality of the present. Death becomes incidental in the course of the consummation of the resurrection joy.

The Second Coming of Christ

The Incarnate Son of God not only revealed the will of the Father; not only suffered, died upon the Cross, arose from the dead and ascended into Heaven; He not only founded His Church on the day of Pentecost; but He promised that He would come again to judge both the living and the dead and to consign every man to the eternal state which he has earned for himself.

The Incarnation, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection of our Lord become meaningful only in the light of the impending Last Judgment. It is at the Second Coming when we shall see the final fruits of the Divine Dispensation in Christ.

The evidence in the Bible concerning the Second Coming is more than abundant. The Lord refers to it on numerous occasions. The epistles of St. Paul are replete with the doctrine concerning the day of judgment. It is a fundamental and cardinal truth of our Faith. We confess and acknowledge it each time we recite the Creed at the Divine Liturgy: "And He shall come again to judge both the

living and the dead; Whose kingdom shall have no end." It is impossible to be a follower of Christ and an adherent to the Orthodox Faith without accepting that Christ will come a second time to judge the world.

Not only did our Blessed Lord teach us that He will come again, but reason itself dictates that there will be a final judgment of all men. There remains much evil in the world which goes unpunished and so much good that goes apparently unrewarded. Human justice is imperfect. We know how often individuals guilty of heinous crimes have been found innocent and acquitted, while innocent people have been found guilty by courts and have suffered punishment unjustly.

The human conscience revolts against injustice. It thirsts for justice, because God created man with this thirst and this inner hunger. Christ said: "Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall be filled." It is on the day of Final Judgment that we shall see the perfect justice of God. Each man then shall receive his due.

A faithful Christian forbears patiently in times of trials and tribulations, because he is of the conviction that his sorrow is temporary. He believes that the Lord knows that he is suffering unjustly and that the day will come when he will be rewarded for his virtue. To suffer unjustly serves to make us yearn still more for the coming of the day of Final Judgment. Life would be unbearable were it not for man's hope and expectation of the coming of absolute justice which will rectify the injustices and the defective justice prevalent in this sinful world.

Moral responsibility, moreover, stands or falls with the Christian truth concerning God's Final Judgment. It gives ground and justification to doing what is good and refraining from what is evil. There would be no real purpose to God's moral ordinances without a forthcoming judgment. The thought of the judgment serves as a deterrent. It restrains our instincts and helps us from falling into sin. The fear of divine punishment and the torment of hell serves in encouraging self-discipline. Although Christian growth never results simply from the fear of impending divine wrath, yet, an element of fear serves an important purpose in our development out of spiritual immaturity into spiritual maturity.

Thus the teaching concerning the Second Coming of Christ is but the confirmation of what reason itself dictates. It is the very justification of our faith and hope in Jesus Christ. Our faith would be in vain were it not for the assurance that He will come again.

His Second Coming will contrast with His first advent into the world. Then He came in condescension and hardly known, except to a handful of shepherds. But in that Last Day He will come in glory surrounded by His holy angels who will trumpet His appearance. Then He came to show mercy to sinful man, to suffer, and to die for him. Now there will be no mercy—only justice and judgment. Then He said, "I have not come to judge, but to save the world." But now He will exercise judgment. Then He was the Savior; now He will be the Judge.

The Lord Himself vividly describes His Second Coming. He shall come—not humble and obscure—in a manger, but seated upon the throne of His glory in power and majesty. Before Him shall be gathered all nations and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates his sheep from the goats. He shall set the sheep on His right hand, and the goats on the left. The sheep typify those who believed in Christ and lived according to His teachings; while the goats represent the unbelievers who rejected Him and His Gospel of Redemption.

To those on His right hand, He shall say, "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Those on His left hand will hear these words: "Depart from me ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

All of the promises of God have been fulfilled. The Messiah came into the world to save man. The Lord Himself foretold that He would rise from the grave and He did rise. He foretold that the Holy Spirit would be sent on the day of Pentecost to give birth to the Church and the Holy Spirit did descend and the Church was established. Only one more promise of the Lord remains to be fulfilled: His Second Coming on the dreadful day of Judgment. It is only a matter of time. When He will come no man knows. The Son of Man will come as the "thief in the night" when He is least expected. The day and the hour were not revealed to us. It is not

for us to know when He will come. It suffices for us to know that He will come and that we must be prepared every moment of every day by being vigilant in faith and in obedience.

Heaven

Man, unlike other creatures, was created to share in the nature of God, especially in His cognition and eternity. Coming out of "the dust of the earth," he develops into a spiritual being and lives forever. Death does not bring extinction to man, but simply transfers him from this world into another.

Since man is created in the "image and likeness of God," he is destined to be a "partaker of divine nature." The end of man is to share eternally in the unending blessedness of the divine life. To reach this level of deification man from now must unite with God in Christ through the communion of the Holy Spirit. Such theosis is not attained in Heaven, unless it is initially attained in this earthly life. In a certain sense Heaven begins in this world.

Heaven is the state of experiencing the supreme joy of being in union with God. It begins in this life with the rebirth that comes with faith and the sacramental life of the Church and extends into eternity in the hereafter. The "newness of life" is a preliminary foretaste of Heaven and the beginning of the ineffable happiness which finds its fulness in Heaven beyond the grave. This is what our Lord meant when He said, "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you."

Consequently, Heaven starts while we are still sojourning in our earthly abode. It is our possession so long as we remain in holiness and grace. It could be forfeited by a relapse into sin. Once, however, we have moved into the eternal mansions of the House of the Lord, Heaven can never be lost, because then we will be incapable of sinning. We shall be fixed in virtue and holiness and immuned to sin and its consequences in the way the angels are at the throne of Divine Majesty.

Our Lord speaks of Heaven as the "Kingdom of God," "everlasting life," or simply as "life." For example, He says, "I have come

that ye may have life and abundance of life." He also said, "I am the life." Life is not merely a state of existing. It is rather a state of joyful existence, while death is a state of painful existence—and not extinction.

A true Christian believer never dies. Death is but a deep slumber. The early Christians spoke of death as "falling asleep in the Lord." Christ equated death with the sorrow and anguish that sin and disobedience generate. Hence, some people are in the state of death though they may be still breathing, while those who have expired may be enjoying life in its joyful plenitude.

The joy of Heaven defies description. It cannot compare with any of the joys of this world. The human imagination is incapable of picturing the magnitude of the bliss of that eternal state. The Holy Spirit declares that "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered in the heart of man what things God hath prepared for them that love Him."

Now we see God as through a glass dimly. Then we shall see Him face to face. While all enjoy the bliss of seeing God, all do not experience the same degree of blessedness. The word of God reveals that "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory." The extent of blessedness will depend on the extent of rebirth and holiness reached upon earth. The liturgical texts point to a hierarchy of saints in the Church Triumphant in Heaven: Theotokos Virgin Mary, St. John the Baptist, the Holy Twelve Apostles, the Holy Fathers and Doctors, the Martyrs, and SS. Joachim and Anna (parents of the Blessed Virgin), followed by the other saints of the Church.

At the moment of death a righteous soul receives the reward to which it is entitled to a partial degree. This is known as Particular Judgment. At this stage the soul foretastes the sweetness of Heaven. At the Second Coming when Christ appears again to exercise Final Judgment the soul enters into the fulness of the supreme happiness of Heaven.

In that last day the bodies of the dead will be re-constituted and will rise to re-unite with the souls. The bodies of the righteous will

be glorified in the same manner that the risen body of Christ was glorified. "He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead." They will be free from physical infirmities and wants, including the natural, biological process: eating, drinking, and sexual activity. Sickness and corruption will no longer have any hold on them. "So is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." By virtue of the Incarnation of the Son of God and His bodily ascension into Heaven, the body of all believers will join the soul in inheriting eternity.

"To live is Christ and to die is gain." This has been the overmastering conviction throughout the ages of all those who truly love Christ and calculate no effort or loss for the sake of gaining possession of Heaven. Death is a blessing for the person of deep faith. He is not only unafraid of the reality of death, but anticipates death as a welcomed flight from this vain world of temptation and sorrow to the enrapturing bliss of God's Presence throughout eternity.

Hell

If Heaven is the state of unspeakable joy, then Hell is the state of incomprehensively intense sorrow and pain. It is death, strictly speaking, while Heaven is life. The soul dies spiritually when it separates itself from God by rejecting Christ in disbelief and disobedience. In such a state man dwells under the wrath of God and becomes deserving of eternal condemnation. Man creates his own Hell while he still lives in this fleeting world.

The first destruction of the ungodly was brought about by water in the days of Noah, whereas the last and eternal one according to the revealed word of God will be by fire. The end of the world will come with conflagration and destruction. In that last day the heavens shall vanish with a great noise, the elements shall be dissolved by consuming fire, and the earth together with all things

upon it shall be burned to ashes. We read in the Bible: "The world that then was being overflowed with water, perished; but the heavens that now are and the earth by the same word have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men."

"Whosoever believeth on Him shall not perish," but those who have refused to accept the Son of God shall suffer eternal perdition. "Whosoever believeth not shall be condemned." God will inflict everlasting punishment upon those who have ignored the Gospel of His Crucified and Risen Incarnate Son. Jews, Moslems, Hindus, atheists, theists, and heretics who have heard the preaching of the Gospel but have rejected it will be punished eternally, as well as those Christian believers who have desecrated their baptismal holiness with sinful living.

It is not merely good deeds that will save man from Hell, but the works of virtue performed in the name of Jesus Christ. "I was hungry and you gave me to eat. . . . So long as you have done this to one of the least of my brethren, you have done it to me." To feed the hungry, to refreshen the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to visit the sick and those in prison will earn for us God's Heaven only when these are done with a Christ-centered frame of mind. To relieve the needy and the suffering in the awareness of Christ's presence is meritorious. When we see Christ in the face of those we help, then our almsgiving is well-pleasing to God. Good works apart from faith in Christ are worthless. Conversely, faith without works can be of no profit.

Christ speaks of Hell as the "everlasting fire," the "bottomless pit (Gehenna)," the "furnace of unquenchable fire," and as the "outer darkness where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." At the Court of Heaven the ungodly will hear the dreadful words which the Lord has already revealed to us. He shall pronounce upon them the sentence: "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels."

The Church has not defined in concrete terms the nature and exact properties of the fire in Hell. It is the view of many theologians that it is not a material fire, but rather a consuming sense of remorse and an agonizing feeling of loss. In the Gospel parable

the rich man "in Hell, being in torment, lifted up his eyes, and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus in his bosom. . . . He was in anguish in that flame."

It is obvious that the condemned will sense the remote reality of Divine Blessedness and the participation of those rewarded without themselves being able to join them. There is no communication between Heaven and Hell. "And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able and none may cross from there to us."

It is the very awareness of God that causes the damned in Hell to suffer indescribable pain and torment. To them He is "consuming fire," rather than glory and sweetness. His all-pervading Presence is their condemnation in the way that the unworthy are scorched and consumed when receiving the Precious Body and Blood of Christ in the Holy Communion. The Divine Presence brings them judgment and damnation.

The disobedient are separated from God spiritually, but never ontologically. All men whether righteous or ungodly move and have their being in God. But it is man's free choice that determines if the Divine Presence will be to his blessedness or to his torment. The Spirit of God is in all places and filleth all things. We cannot escape His all-encompassing presence, either in this world or in the world which is to come.

There are many passages in the Bible in which the Lord warns the wicked and calls them to repentance while there is still time. "But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. For He will render to every man according to his works. . . . For those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil."

The unbeliever or the believer who is guilty of mortal sin is transferred to Hell immediately at the moment of death where punishment remains undiminished with the lapse of time. Everyone in Hell repents, but it is too late then. It only serves to create anguish. Repentance helps us while we are still living this ephemeral life.

The Precious Blood of Jesus Christ washes away the most abominable sins when we bend our heart in repentance and contrition. The thief on the cross who repented was promised Paradise at the last moment of his life. As long as we still breath, we can escape Hell by repenting of our sins.

Our Duty to the Dead

The individual that departs this world in faith does not cease to be a member of the Church. Once a member of the Body of Christ, always a member throughout eternity. Upon leaving this life he enters the abode of the departed faithful and joins the Church Triumphant. The Church upon earth (Church Militant) is one with the Church Triumphant.

We upon earth continue to wage the battle of Faith while those departed are already sharing the blessedness of triumph. They have finished their course and have ended their struggle against the Devil and his temptations. They receive our prayers and veneration, while we invoke their intercessions for the salvation of our souls. Between those upon earth and the departed souls there is perpetual communion. It is especially at the celebration of the Divine Liturgy that the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant come together in an intimate communion and union as the One Body of Christ. The Sacrifice of the Liturgy is offered up for the departed souls as well as for the living. It is the very bond of union. While we ascend heavenward one with the offered Gifts, the souls of the departed descend upon the Altar. The Blessed Virgin, the Apostles, the Martyrs, the Fathers, and all the Saints are "remembered" at each offering. By means of such mutual prayer and communion, the Church maintains her identity with Christ including the living and the dead.

There is no greater blessing for a departed soul than being "remembered" at the Liturgy. The more often the "remembrance" is made the greater the benefit which the departed soul experiences. There is no better way to express our devotion to a beloved one who has passed away than to give his name to the Priest with the request

that he remember it at the Divine Liturgy. Eucharistic remembrances are ineffective, of course, in transferring a soul from Hell into Heaven, but they are efficacious in increasing the blessedness which the soul experiences in Heaven, since, as we have observed already, there are degrees of blessedness in Heaven. A prosphoron or offering bread should also be brought to the Altar as a gift to be offered up in the Divine Liturgy for the repose of a departed soul. It must be noted that remembrances are to be made only for those who died true to the Faith of Christ. Non-Orthodox cannot be "remembered," since they do not receive from the Orthodox Chalice and are not members of the Body of Christ.

Every Divine Liturgy is a Mnemosynon, that is, a Remembrance or Commemoration service, irrespective of the day it is celebrated. Names of both the living and the dead can be remembered at any Liturgy. However, there are designated days when special Mnemosynon services are conducted for the repose of the departed, as, for example, on the fortieth day after death, the sixth month, the first year, the third year. It is our obligation not to forget our dead at least on these days.

At these special Mnemosynon services a dish of boiled wheat mixed with sugar is placed on a table in front of the Sanctuary screen. The grain of wheat represents the reality of the resurrection of the dead, while the sugar denotes the sweetness and bliss of the Kingdom of Heaven. Just as the grain, when buried in the earth, sprouts and rises into a new life, so also does man rise from the grave at the general resurrection in a new life with an incorruptible and glorious body. Our Lord had said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." The boiled wheat should not be covered with a layer of sugar. The wheat must be visible if it is to have any significance at all. The sugar may be placed over the center in the shape of a cross without completely covering the wheat.

It is important to remember that a Mnemosynon service is possible without the dish of boiled wheat (*coliva*), but never without the offering bread (*prosphoron*). It is the *prosphoron*, from which the Body of Christ will be taken, that is essential to the Mnemosynon and our primary concern and care should be the preparation of the

prosphoron. Sacramental wine, oil, and incense should also be carried to the Sanctuary as an offering for the repose of the departed.

Our Holy Church teaches from ancient times that in addition to the Eucharistic "remembrances," almsgiving can also bring increased blessedness to those who have departed in faith. Doing special deeds of mercy and giving alms to the poor in the memory and in the name of a certain beloved one who has passed away is a further way of expressing our love and devotion to that soul. Those who receive the alms are requested to pray for the departed relative or friend that Almighty God might forgive him all his sins and grant him the plenitude of blessedness. Also making memorial offerings to the Church brings advantage to a soul and it is an excellent practice to prefer this to spending large sums on flowers that last for a short time and are of no benefit to the dead.

Being One With the Church

Remember that being a member of the Church means you must take an active share in her spiritual life. To be an Orthodox Christian means to put aside all selfishness and individualism and join with others in serving the mission of the Church. It means making use, through private and collective efforts, of the spiritual resources which Jesus Christ has deposited in His Church for our spiritual welfare. It means searching into Holy Scriptures and other instructive books for a richer understanding and experience of our membership in the Body of Christ. It means contributing toward creating a deeper and more evangelical spirit in the immediate community of the parish. It means bringing others to the fuller knowledge of Christ and the Faith of the Orthodox Church. Above all, to live the life of the Church is to share frequently in her Sacramental life.

The "dynamic" person who never fails to sell all his tickets for the next Church dance or raffle and who is always "on the go" is not necessarily sharing in the life of the Church. We must make certain that our efforts are always Christ-orientated. To be a true, living member of the Church means to witness to Christ by the unselfish

giving of oneself to His Gospel. We can do this only by coming out of our shell of self-centeredness and by participating in group endeavors. How wrong they are who think they can be good Orthodox and at the same time live lives of social and spiritual isolation. Faith and obedience to Christ tears down all walls of indifference and self-interest that separate one Orthodox from another.

Being a member of the Church requires that you act and minister within the fellowship of other believers in the Church. You cannot be a Christian in your own private right. The Church is a fellowship of believers and co-workers. It is a community of the redeemed. A good Orthodox tries to identify himself as much as possible with the corporate life of the Church. It is not sufficient to offer up to God private, individual worship and service. It is indispensable to worship God collectively within the Body of Christ. Apart from the Divine Liturgy no private prayer or endeavor is acceptable in the sight of God.

We must be cautious against making the collection of money as the very purpose of the Church. The handling of contributions is a necessary part of Church organization, but soliciting of funds must never turn into the major pursuit of the Church. When the proper attention and energy is devoted to the spiritual cultivation of the members of the Church, only little time will be required to secure the finances of the Church. Giving must be related directly to faith and self-denial. If more concern were to be shown for teaching our members the meaning of Christian stewardship, we would have fewer financial problems.

Conduct in Church

In view of the redemptive nature of the Divine Liturgy, it is imperative for an Orthodox Christian to attend its celebration every Sabbath day, which is the Lord's day, and on week days of the important feasts. It is a grievous sin to be absent without good reason or to attend when it is convenient, when we have nothing else to do, or when we just "feel like it." According to the sacred canons of the Church, the person who fails to attend the Divine Liturgy for

three consecutive Sundays excommunicates himself from Christ and His Holy Church.

But it is not enough to witness the Liturgy. Spiritual benefit accrues to the soul only when we attend with faith and with full understanding of what is being done and said during the service. Instead of just listening to what the Priest and Choir chant, we should put ourselves into the service and identify ourselves with the Choir which represents the congregation. Just to be a spectator is not really of any benefit. It is important to put feeling into our relationship with the Liturgy and not simply be onlookers, who merely stand and watch.

It is helpful to follow the service with the aid of the manual of the Divine Liturgy containing the parallel English translation. In this way we can become familiar with the various parts of the service and the sequence of these parts. It does us no good to simply stand during the service and content ourselves with a vague feeling of piety. When Christ Himself is present at the Altar, as our Crucified Redeemer, how can we be complacent about understanding fully the structure and content of the Divine Liturgy? When the very eternal salvation of our immortal soul is at stake at that time, how can we rest merely with an ambiguous sensation of reverence?

Attendance is not complete without receiving the Holy Communion when the Priest comes out of the Sanctuary and calls upon the congregation: "With fear of God, faith, and love draw near!" The very purpose of the Divine Liturgy is to give believers the opportunity to unite with Christ by receiving of His Precious Body and Blood. Only when we receive do we fully share in the eucharistic worship of this sacramental service. Only then do we enjoy in full the benefits of Christ's redemptive act on Calvary. Properly speaking, we must receive each time we attend the Liturgy. Indeed, failure to receive and negligence in preparing to receive constitutes a grievous sin. Such an omission of duty should never be taken lightly.

The prayers of the Liturgy before the time of communion and after the communion bear immediate reference to the act of receiving. The entire liturgical act centers around the momentous approach to the Altar to partake of the sacred elements. The act of eating and drinking renders the sacraments truly a mystic meal and the Lord's

supper. Apart from receiving the meaning of the Liturgy is utterly lost and grossly violated.

The period of the whole week should be orientated toward Communion time at the Divine Liturgy. A good Orthodox regards this moment as precious, because it is a station of renewal in the course of the week. The believer is re-inforced spiritually to combat the temptations of evil during the week ahead. On Sunday he is forgiven of the sins which he has committed during those days and he is re-equipped to continue the Christian life of spiritual combat. God has given us this day of Resurrection to gain the inner renewal without which the life of the believer is drained and exhausted spiritually and finally falls prey to the snares of Satan.

Whenever we enter the Church, it is not proper just to sit and gaze about, whether the service is in progress or not. Do not sit in the pew and stare at others, or stand around the doors or in the corners cold and motionless. Remember that the Church is the House of God. Our conduct should be becoming to the sacredness of the surroundings. Bend your knees or bow your head in prayer, if you are waiting for the service to begin or you are waiting to see the Priest.

We should show reverence at all times while in Church. Light your candle and reverence the Holy Icons in humility and piety. Avoid all talking, whispering, noise, disturbance, and disorder of any kind. If you have an offering of bread, wine, or oil to make, bring it to Church early in the morning. If you have names of the living and dead to be "remembered" at the Altar, bring them before the Liturgy begins.

Never attempt to transact business with the Priest while the Liturgy is in progress. Above all, never open the side doors of the Sanctuary for any reason. The Sanctuary is the most sacred part of the Church; it is the Holy of Holies. Only the officiating clergy and their servers are permitted to enter. The Archangels depicted upon the side doors are there to remind us that these doors are to be guarded and not to be opened to everyone. How irreverent and sacrilegious it is to rush in and out of the Sanctuary! Especially Protestants and Roman Catholics are not allowed to enter the Sanctuary, whether they are clergy or lay, since they are not communicants at the altar.

Conversing with God in Prayer

It has been pointed out that union with the sanctifying Spirit of God comes only with participating in the corporate worship of the Church, namely, the Divine Liturgy. The Body of Christ which is the aggregate of believers offers such worship to God. But, by the same token corporate worship should be supplemented by private prayer for a spiritually balanced life of communion with God.

Both private and corporate worship are necessary to a properly proportionate life of prayer. The one without the other is of no profit. It is insufficient to go to Church on Sundays and to neglect praying at home in private on week days. It is equally insufficient to pray at home in private and to fail to attend the Divine Liturgy on Sunday. The one cannot be substituted for the other. A practicing Orthodox Christian goes to Church to share in the vicarious sacrifice of the Holy Communion and during the week prays in the privacy of his home to which he carries the redeeming grace of the Holy Eucharist.

Equal zeal should be shown for both types of worship. Our Blessed Lord teaches us: "When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret and your Father who sees in secret will reward you in the open."

Since Baptism and the Holy Communion bring us into union with Christ for eternal salvation, the life of the regenerated believer is normally one of constant intercourse with God. Such a relationship with God is experienced and sustained by conversing with God in prayer. In prayer we acknowledge God as our Creator and Heavenly Father. We thank and glorify Him as the fountainspring of all existence and of all blessings. Prayer is the response of the soul to the ever-abiding presence of God Who is the beginning and end of creation.

The Spirit of God teaches us in Scripture to "pray without stopping." Sensing the reality of God in our life, as an abiding experience, effects a true communion between the soul and God. The life of such continuous awareness, as a constant disposition of the heart, is the life of unceasing prayer. Thinking, speaking, and acting in

such a state of mental intercourse with God is to pray without stopping. Living itself becomes simply the act of praying. Our thoughts can ascend to God often and not only when we do special acts of prayer at appointed hours. We should meditate frequently on His Love and Mercy. Whether we work, study, eat, or sleep, we can be mindful of God's presence. All of our activities should be consecrated to His glory.

At certain times of the day a good Christian takes time off from his routine activities in order to kneel in private and speak to God in prayer. Praying before retiring in the evening, upon arising in the morning, before and after meals, and before and after important undertakings is simple evidence of sincere faith and obedience to God.

A prayer deserving of God's response must begin with an expression of thanksgiving and glorification to God for His material and spiritual blessings. Asking for the forgiveness of our sins should always be included, as well as a petition for our several needs, especially those of the soul: grace, peace, joy, hope, and faith. It is always wise to beseech God for the Holy Spirit to indwell in our hearts. True happiness lies in serving the needs of the soul; material goods are of no use when the soul suffers from want of self-fulfillment. It would be foolish not to heed to the words of Christ: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these [material] things shall be added unto you." First things must come first in their order of importance in terms of our eternal purpose.

Prayer is acceptable and well-pleasing to God only when it is offered up with the proper feelings of humility and with the awareness of God's sovereignty and our own dependence and finiteness. Very often our private prayers evoke no response because either we do not pray for what we should or because we do not pray with a humble disposition of conviction and reverence.

We must also remember that prayer is acceptable to God only if we have forgiven those who have offended us. The Lord Himself tells us: "And whenever you pray, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

Our Lord during His earthly ministry demonstrated in actual practice the importance of prayer by leaving His disciples often and going off alone to a quiet place to converse with His Heavenly Father. According to His unfailing promises, all prayers are answered by God when they are well-pleasing in His sight: "Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you receive it and you will. . . . Seek and you shall find; knock and it will be opened unto you."

God answers our prayers very often in ways in which we do not expect, because God's ways are not man's ways. It is up to us to seek to recognize God's response wherever and whenever it may appear. Many times it is there, but we cannot recognize it. The divine answer comes in strange ways which are unexpected but which are to our ultimate welfare. It does not always come in terms of convenience and to our liking. If we have fervent and unshaken faith in the loving kindness and inscrutable wisdom of God, then it is unquestionable and certain that He is answering our humble and heartfelt petition. We can detect His answer in the all-pervading experience of faith and commitment to His will.

Reading the Bible

When the Church was founded on Pentecost with the descent of the Holy Spirit, the Risen Lord left His revealed word in the life of the Church. His Holy Spirit guided the Church "into all truth" by preserving pure and intact whatsoever He had proclaimed during His earthly ministry. The message of the Gospel was preached and transmitted orally in the beginning, but at the same time it was being written by the Apostles of Christ and the disciples of the Apostles. These written documents proclaiming the word of God later comprised the New Testament, as writings inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit spoke not only through the prophets of the Old Testament, but especially through the Apostles of Jesus Christ who fulfilled the prophecies and brought the fulness of Truth into the world. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament are divinely-

inspired writings through which God speaks to man; both together constitute the Holy Bible or Holy Scriptures.

The Bible is God's revelation to man. In His written word we come to an understanding of what He wills, what His purpose is for us, and what His eternal design is for the redemption of man.

By reading the Holy Scriptures our soul feeds on spiritual food. We are nourished and strengthened inwardly. We learn what the will of God is, His Law, and commandments. We enlighten ourselves as to God's nature, His relations with man, and His infinite Love in Christ. To read the Bible is to listen to what God speaks to us and to experience the unspeakable joy of communicating with our Blessed Lord. Christ becomes more real to us when we read the very words He uttered while upon earth. We can sense His closeness to us, as we hear Him speak to us in Holy Scriptures. What greater joy can man experience than contacting the living word of God! "The words that I speak unto you," our Divine Master said, "they are spirit and they are life."

Studying the Bible renews our spiritual life. It strengthens our faith in God and awakens us out of any possible spiritual lethargy. It revives our love for God and re-inforces our determination to serve His divine will.

It is not sufficient to hear the Epistle and Gospel read at Church on Sundays. It is our Christian obligation to spend a few minutes each day at home with the Bible. To be unacquainted with the Bible is to show little concern for our eternal welfare. It is to show indifference to God's invitation to His Heavenly Kingdom. In the words of St. John Chrysostom, "To be ignorant of Scripture is the cause of all evil!" And if there is evil and laxity in our Orthodox circles, one good reason is that our faithful never bother to open the inspired Scriptures. How often we condemn ourselves in the eyes of God when we show considerable zeal in reading newspapers, books, and magazines (frequently of a light nature), while we totally ignore that unique Book which offers us our eternal benefit and everlasting welfare!

We will profit from the Bible only when we read it with due reverence, faith, and humility. Consider that you are opening—not just another book—but the Book in which God speaks to you. Read

in small portions with prayerful attention and then follow with a meditation. What you find difficult to grasp should be brought to the Priest who will be happy to help you understand the true meaning of the text.

Parents would do well to accustom their children in the reading of the Bible, as well, of course, as in the reading of other religiously instructive literature. Example speaks louder than words in this regard. A household is truly Christian, peaceful, and happy when parents make Bible reading a regular practice.

There is inexpressible joy and unending blessedness in store for those who are diligent in the study of the Bible. It is an experience which is rewarding in this present life and in the life which is to come. "Blessed is the man whose delight is in the law of the Lord and in His law doth he meditate day and night."

Fasting

It is impossible to be obedient to Christ and at the same time to give unlimited indulgence to our physical desires. Since fasting serves to discipline the natural drives of the body, it is inseparable from Orthodox Christian living.

To fast is to prove that our soul can rule the body. It demonstrates that man "shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that cometh out of the mouth of the Lord." Fasting reminds us that nourishing the soul is more important for our eternal welfare than feeding only the body.

Fasting was a common practice among the Jews prior to the coming of Christ into the world. A misfortune or a disaster was always mourned with strict fasting. When the Jews, for example, were defeated by the men of Ai (Joshua 7:6), Joshua and the elders of Israel remained prostrate before the Ark of the Covenant from morning until evening without eating. In the Christian sense fasting is an expression of sorrow for personal sinfulness and unworthiness.

But fasting was associated also with the preparation for receiving some special calling or gift from God. Moses fasted forty days on Mt. Horeb in preparation to receive the tablets with the ten commandments from God. Our Savior Himself fasted for forty days and forty nights in the wilderness before He embarked on His earthly ministry.

Those who go to the limit of enjoying legitimate pleasures very easily slip into illegitimate pleasures. There is nothing intrinsically evil with any food or drink. But occasional restriction or omission of eating coupled with more frequent prayer can be of incalculable value to the Christian believer. Our Lord Himself assured us: "This generation [that is, of evil spirits] can come out only by fasting and praying." Success against the devil's influence and against all temptation to sin is made possible only by these two means.

"It's what's in your heart that counts and not what you eat." As high-sounding as this might appear, it is very far from the truth which Christ has declared to us and has practiced for our benefit. We cannot attain our end in life—to become "in the image of God"—without foregoing the natural appetites of the body from time to time. By fasting we are given a foretaste of the blessed life to come in the Kingdom of God where there will be no eating, drinking, or sexual activity, but only the unspeakable joy that comes with communing with God and praising His infinite Majesty.

Our Mother Church has appointed Fridays and Wednesdays, as the two fast days for each week. (The exception is the week following Easter and the Nativity.) Wednesday marks the weekly commemoration of the betrayal of Christ and the beginning of His Holy Passion, while on Friday we call to mind the vicarious death of Christ upon the Cross.

In addition, there are the two forty-day periods: Advent, which leads up to the feast of the Nativity (December 25) and Lent, which leads up to the feast of the Resurrection (Easter). There is also the two-week period, which leads up to the feast of the Repose of the Blessed Virgin (August 15) and the period leading up to the feast of the Holy Apostles (June 30), beginning after the movable feast of Pentecost.

Very often the question is raised: "From what must I fast?"

The holy canons of the Church enjoin that we should abstain from meat, eggs, and dairy foods on each of the prescribed fast days. Strictly speaking, even fish is forbidden to be eaten on fast days with the exception of shell fish, like clams, shrimps, oysters, etc.

Only those whose health has been impaired can lessen the strictness of fasting; it is possible to be totally excused from fasting if reasons of health require so. The strictness of the rule can also be relaxed by those who may be travelling or who find themselves under abnormal or irregular circumstances on fast days.

It is important to remember that fasting must go hand in hand with sexual abstinence. Married people should not forget that fasting is pleasing to God and spiritually profitable only when it is accompanied by self-denial as regards marital intercourse. Every fast day is a day of sexual abstinence. Here again what is lawful and natural is curbed for the purpose of giving more time and attention to the needs of the soul. The Bible affirms in this respect: "Do not refuse one another except by agreement for a season that you may devote yourselves to prayer" (1 Cor. 7:5).

There is no necessary connection between fasting and receiving the Holy Communion. Fasting is not mandatory on the day before receiving the Holy Communion, especially in the case of receiving frequently or even every Sunday. When fasting becomes an impediment or deterrent to frequent receiving then it ceases to be spiritually beneficial. This does not mean that anybody can receive without fasting the day before; the determining factor is the faith and sincerity of the individual who is to receive. What is of utmost importance is the need and the benefit of partaking of the Precious Body and Blood of the Lord, as frequently as possible.

The Sick

Sickness and disease have been the lot of mankind ever since sin entered the world. God created man free of physical and spiritual infirmities, but the disobedience of our first parents resulted in man's bodily, as well as spiritual depravity. The disturbance of the moral

order brought about an upheaval in the physical order of things. Inanimate creation shares in the fruits of sin. The Bible teaches, "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now."

In the last analysis, sin is the cause of all sickness and disease. There is a natural connection between the health of the soul and the health of the body. Physical disease is the result of spiritual sickness either directly or indirectly. But to those who have been regenerated in Jesus Christ, bodily sickness, like death, serves no longer as a punishment; it serves rather as a spiritual discipline. The consequence of original sin turns into a means for our ultimate spiritual welfare. God, therefore, permits sickness to befall even the best of His children, just as death comes even to the most devout Christian.

We can never be completely certain whether sickness is a chastisement for personal sin or simply a means of spiritual discipline. It may be both. Consequently, it is well to turn our minds to the Lord immediately when sickness comes upon us or upon other members of our household. Parents may be chastised often in the sickness and suffering of their children. In such a case it is the parents that experience inner anguish and not the children whose pain is primarily physical and not mental. The husband can be chastised through the illness of the wife and vice-versa. In time of sickness in the family we must reflect on the sins we have committed and turn to God for forgiveness. If disease is not the direct result of personal sins, then God permits us to be afflicted in order to try our own faith and patience or the Christian virtue of other members in the family.

In moments of critical illness we need to turn to God in prayer and beseech Him to grant us recovery. In certain instances our prayers are answered with the restoration of our health. In other cases sickness is not cured and the fatal end follows. Death is due either to the possibility of insufficiency of faith in the person who is ill or in those of the household.

When God permits disease to afflict a person over an extended period of time, it is because He wills to bring his faith and patience to a stage of perfection, which merits the supreme reward of God

both in this world and in the hereafter. When God allows the fatal moment to come instead of recovery, it is because He wills to bring an end to his tribulation and to grant him eternal repose. Passing away from this world does not serve as a penalty to those who depart, although it can be a chastisement to the surviving members of the household. When God calls to Himself His suffering servant, we must look at it as a means of healing. It is another way God answers our prayers and heals the sick.

We should accept sickness with submission to God's will, thinking of what our Lord said when He received the bitter cup of suffering. Say with Jesus: "Not my will but Thine be done." In time of sickness spend time in reading the Holy Scriptures, if this is physically possible. If not, have your relatives or friends read to you in a soft tone of voice. One of the best ways we can be of help and comfort to the sick when visiting them is to offer up a prayer for them and also read to them appropriate passages from the Bible. The Psalms offer much inner strength and solace to the seriously ill. It is time well spent and is more beneficial than trite talk and commonplace conversation, that often wearies the sick.

If disease visits us not as a direct result of our sins, it can serve the purpose of awakening our faith in God and reminding us of our dependence upon Him. Any trying moment in our life teaches us the need for communicating with our Heavenly Father and reminds us of the frailty of the human body and the ephemeral character of our earthly life. Nothing happens to us by chance. We never suffer misfortune fortuitously. There is a hidden or obvious purpose to our sickness. The will of God is unfathomable and His infinite wisdom is unsearchable. We must trust in His loving kindness however it may express itself as chastisement. We must have faith in His infinite Love however it may concede to our pain and sorrow. God's ways are not our ways.

A truly believing Christian knows how to respond to an incurable and fatal disease. If he knows his weeks and days are counted because of cancer, for example, he will regard the remaining time of his life as precious in preparing for a Christian end. He will repent of his sin and failures, make his confession to the Priest for absolution, and request that he receive of the Holy Communion frequently.

Such a person is fortunate in having the opportunity to prepare himself spiritually for a Christian death and for certainty in winning the everlasting happiness of the Kingdom of Heaven.

In case of serious sickness the Priest should be summoned to administer the Holy Unction. This sacramental rite consists of the consecration of oil, prayer for the sick, and the anointing for the healing of body and soul. The Priest anoints the sick saying: "O Holy Father, physician of souls and bodies, Who didst send Thine Only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to heal all manner of sickness and deliver from death, heal Thou this Thy servant of every suffering. . . ."

A good Christian turns to prayer with special fervor when he falls ill. He repents of his sins and beseeches God for forgiveness. When he is in bed seriously ailing, he calls for the Priest to make his confession and to receive frequent Holy Communion. He does not wait for others to decide when to call him, but specifically requests that he be called. He does not wait for the dying moment when he is unconscious or in a coma to have the Priest rush to his bedside with the Holy Communion. It is futile and of no value to have the Priest come when a sick person has lost consciousness and is in no position to confess, to pray, to hear the Priest, and to receive the final Communion. Nor should a person be under heavy sedation when the Priest calls, regardless the intensity of pain. Excess sedation prevents the good Christian from reflecting on his pain and gaining the spiritual benefit for which God has permitted it.

Failure to receive the Holy Communion prior to the moment of death need not be regarded as a disaster, if the dying person had been receiving frequently until the time of his illness. If an Orthodox Priest cannot be reached, it will not help to call a Roman Catholic Priest, despite the emergency. The Communion of the Roman Catholic Church is not only an invalid sacrament but it is a mutilated one. Communion is administered only under one kind and this, too, is only a wafer, instead of bread.

For those who receive regularly under normal circumstances, the Holy Communion is not a certain indication of impending death when received in bed during grave illness. The dying should be left alone to the care of the Priest who should be sent for without delay.

He will duly prepare him to leave this life in faith and repentance, worthy of entering into God's eternal Presence.

In the event that the sickness is at home, the Priest who arrives with the Holy Communion, must always be met at the door with a lighted candle which should be kept burning in front of him as he carries the Precious Sacrament. Upon his departure he must be led to the door with the lighted candle and, if possible, all the way to his car. As soon as the Priest enters the house, all those present kiss his hand and make the sign of the Cross, as a way of expressing veneration for the Blessed Sacraments.

The Monastic Life

The institution which has nourished and re-inforced the spiritual vitality of the Church from antiquity has been known as Monasticism. Those who enter the monastic life devote themselves wholly to prayer in a withdrawn and secluded community for the purpose of attaining the vision of the divine light in spiritual perfection and of winning the promised reward of supreme blessedness. The men who lead the monastic life are called monks, while the women are known as nuns.

There are two major facts that can account for the rise and flourish of Monasticism in earlier ages: (1) the lowering of the spiritual standards in the general membership in the Church, and (2) the perpetual panic and tension in society caused by the constant siege in which the empire existed and the almost continuous state of war with its barbarian neighbors.

Withdrawal from the world was prompted by the search for spiritual perfection and by obedience to the commandment of our Lord: "If you want to be perfect, sell all your possessions, give to the poor, come and follow me, and you shall have treasures in heaven." General discontentment with a lowered plateau of spiritual attainment within the Church pushed more zealous souls to abandon the world and to seek a closer communion with God either in solitude or in a

cloistered community. They withdrew from the severe temptations and adversities of a cruel world to save their souls from perishing. They looked for a haven of quiet and peace where they could unite with God in prayer and contemplation. Having grown weary of the world with its passionate distractions and vanity, they searched in the silence of the monastery to find the spiritual rapture of divine communion. Were it not for the refuge provided by monasticism, many souls would have been lost in complete spiritual collapse and despair.

Those who enter the monastic life carry no doubt the heavier cross of self-denial and mortification. They forsake parents, relatives, and friends to be alone with God. The legitimate pleasures of life are sacrificed for the sake of enjoying the higher and more deeply satisfying pleasure of union with God.

The Holy Fathers have spoken of the monastic life as the "angelic life," because by continually praising and glorifying God the monks imitate the angels in Heaven. They live as "incarnate angels" and "heavenly men." In the monastic community the monk spends his time in prayer, study, and work. He renounces the world with all its pomp, allurements, and deception. He leads a life of self-catharsis and close fellowship with God. His life is one long communion and union with the Divine. He strives to unite with God in order to reach the light of divine glory.

Obviously the monastic life is not a life of selfishness nor simply a life of escape. It is impossible, since the Lord Himself endows certain people with such a vocation. "Not everybody can receive this saying," Christ teaches us; "he who can receive it, let him receive it." "There are some who have become eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven," was the saying of the Lord. We must learn to respect the monastic calling in others, if we do not have it ourselves.

If Christian commitment involves mortification of physical passions, self-abnegation, and renouncement of worldly attachments, then monasticism represents truly the ideal of obedience to Christ and of spiritual perfection. By nature man is allured to the enjoyment of the material pleasures of the world. The monastic calling requires a supernatural way of life which is made possible by a greater degree of faith, unselfishness, and self-denial. It is certainly

not the easier way, but it is undoubtedly the surer way to winning eternal life. In the Orthodox tradition the monastic life has always been considered as far more meritorious and higher than the married life.

The monk does not only pray for himself; the many hours which he devotes to prayer are not self-seeking. His supplications rise to Heaven for the salvation and welfare of all men and for the peace of the whole world. If we believe in the power of prayer and if we truly cherish the knowledge that others pray for us, then monasticism is unquestionably of inestimable value for the Church and for the whole world. Little do we realize that our wicked and apostate world is spared from God's just wrath and destruction only because of the countless, obscure "angels in flesh" who chant and commune with God throughout the long nights while the rest of the world is asleep. We can sleep safely and securely under God's mercy, because others keep vigil in prayer and adoration.

In the pragmatic society of our western world we tend to measure all human accomplishment in terms of industriousness and immediate, practical results. The mentality of a technological culture makes it difficult for us to see anything worthwhile to secluded contemplation and long hours of worship. In our activistic world of being "on the go" and "getting things done" we are prone to slight monasticism as a pitiful waste of time and human energy.

We should not forget that action was perhaps more urgent in earlier centuries when monasticism was most highly venerated, than in our day. Every able-bodied man was valuable to defense when foot soldiers in quantity decided victory in battle. Yet, Emperor Justinian of the sixth century, for example, could say with sincere conviction then what modern statesmen would now take with amusement: "The empire needs both monks and soldiers to survive: soldiers to fight the barbarians and monks to pray for victory." What a far cry from the modern materialistic reliance solely on the strength of armed forces!

With the Orthodox Church moving westward especially with the turn of the century, we find that she has come under some western influence, as regards the understanding of the purpose and nature of traditional monasticism. Among both the clergy and the laity

there has been a negative attitude shown toward monasticism within the past one hundred years, particularly since the liberation of Greece. Monasteries, once flourishing centers radiating with spiritual life, now serve as curiosities and tourist attractions that have taken their place alongside the classical ruins that bespeak past glories. The purely contemplative life has lost its hold, for example, on a large segment of the Greek element in the Church. Piety has taken a wholly intramundane direction. Working and praying close to society has become the measure of Christian achievement. The alternative has been: traditional monasticism or no monasticism at all. But it is possible that the structure and character of monasticism can be revised in order to make it adjust more to the modern needs, and to maintain it as a true, spiritual asset to the Church and generally to western society which is spiritually bankrupt.

It is not coincidental that the Orthodox Church flourished in proportion as the monastic life had flourished. Neither is it coincidence that the illustrious Fathers and Doctors of the Church, who bequeathed their monumental writings to the Church, as authoritative exponents of the mysteries of the Faith, were essentially monks. It is most inconsistent and dishonest to honor and venerate them as luminaries, while we speak, on the other hand, disparagingly of monasticism that bred their spiritual superiority and distinction.

Human nature never changes. There always will be souls whose longings cannot be satisfied in the secular world. Perhaps monasticism is needed more today when our fast, mechanical way of life has had a demoralizing and nerve-racking effect on man. Our machine age of automation has robbed human life of much of its living contact with the freshness of nature which renews the spirit and gives it rest. There would be fewer nervous breakdowns and suicides were monasticism today still a socially accepted and socially recognized institution, as in days of old.

How Much Money for the Church?

The Church, of course, is not a commercial enterprise in nature and mission. But it does take money to operate our temples of wor-

ship and to further the work of spreading the Gospel of Christ. Men are corporeal, as well as spiritual, beings. We still dwell in a physical sphere where material needs must be met. Buildings are required for worship; these must be heated and maintained. Educational material is needed for our Church Schools; these take money. The Pastors of the Church must be supported so that they may be free to labor for the feeding of Christ's flock which requires round-the-clock attention. Then there are the salaries for the cantors, the secretaries, teachers, janitors, etc., which have to be covered by the money offerings of the members of the Church.

In ancient times pagan priests were supported from public funds. Such was the importance attached to their work. In the Old Testament times the Jews were commanded by God to give one-tenth of their income for the support of the temple and the priests. "And the Lord spake unto Aaron. Behold, I have given the children of Levi [the priests] all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation."

If, as citizens, we make substantial payments to our government in taxes for the support of public servants in the state, how much more are we bound to support the servants of Christ's Church who bring us our eternal salvation! If we care for the support of our natural father without giving it a second thought, how much more concerned should we be about the support of our Father in Christ who has given us the rebirth for eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven!

Giving of our money to the Church is an inseparable part of the life of a true Christian believer. It proves our love for Christ and our loyalty to His Holy Church. It provides us with the opportunity of expressing our faith. Giving cannot be separated from the life of Christian commitment. To love God and to believe in His only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, apart from the practice of giving of our money for the work of His Church is inconceivable. To think that you are pleasing God simply by having faith without giving part of your income to the Church, is self-deception. For, to give is to manifest the spirit of self-denial which Christ demands of His followers. It is to demonstrate that we obey our Lord Who gives

us spiritual blessings in return for the material offerings we make for His glory.

The only Christian way of giving to the Church is on the basis of our personal income. To establish a flat sum for all members of the Church regardless of differing incomes is illogical, unfair, and unjust. The poor and the rich can never be taxed equally. "Dues" are paid to clubs and lodges, not to Churches.

Giving according to our income is an explicit injunction of the word of God. Every Jew in Old Testament times was expected to give one-tenth (*tithe*) of his earnings to the temple. The practice of paying tithes is very ancient. Abraham gave tithes to Melchisedec, a Priest. Jacob vowed to the Lord the tenth of all the possessions he would acquire in Mesopotamia. "Of all that thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto thee." Under the law Moses ordained: "All the tithes of the land whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's; it is holy unto the Lord."

In the New Testament, which is the fuller revelation of God, Christ teaches us also to give, but not in terms of a percentage of our income. He commands us: "Sell all that you have, give to the poor, come and follow me." Our Lord sets no limit to our giving. There can be no limit to our giving in a life of complete self-surrender to Him. If it is unreserved self-denial, then it only follows naturally that one must give without reservation or restriction. We can never give enough to Christ, if we truly believe in Him as our Redeemer. Giving our soul to Him is giving of our material possessions to promote His Kingdom upon earth.

During Apostolic times the teaching of Christ was practiced to the letter. There was no private possession of property. Each Christian would lay all his possessions before the feet of the Apostles. To withhold a portion of it was an unforgivable offence, which met the extreme penalty. We see this in the case of Ananias and Sapphira who lied to St. Peter about the exact amount of their goods. "Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost and to keep back part of the price of the land?" They were struck dead by God's wrath on the spot.

How can we conform to the New Testament command of Christ, when we cannot obey the minimum demand of the Old Law of

Moses? A follower of Christ is a person who is regenerated in the grace of the Holy Ghost and elevated far above the spiritual level of the Jew who had only the Law of Moses to live by. "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."

According to the teaching of the Gospel, man is a steward of the blessings received of God. He really does not own what he possesses. Everything belongs to God. Since everything is God's, it is only natural that we should be generous in offering our money for His purposes. We are simply returning what He has granted us. We should not be offended when the Priest speaks in Church about giving more money, because Christ Himself often spoke about money.

No one, however, should be expected to give to the Church without knowing why he should give and without previous spiritual cultivation and instruction. Poor offerings mean poor Christians and little faith. More effort and investment in Christian education would pay off in dividends. A fervently believing Christian will give spontaneously and generously. Pressure which often has to be applied, as well as repeated and intense exhortations and pleas on the part of the Priest, reveal lack of Christian faith and dedication. Resorting to fund-raising affairs, like dances, raffles and bazaars, is further evidence that spiritual rebirth is missing from the members of the Church. If the same time and energy were devoted to spiritual awakening there would be fewer financial problems in a parish. If we were to "seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness," then "all these things" (like budgetary assets) would be added unto our Churches.

Icons

An Icon is not a mere picture of Christ or of a saint who lived or died for Christ; nor is it simply a religious adornment. An Icon is an expression of a fundamental truth of our Faith, namely, that Christ, though the eternal Son of God, assumed human nature and became man in history. It demonstrates the Incarnation of the Divine

Logos and shows that Christ, though true God, became a historical figure who can be circumscribed in His human nature and depicted as a God-Man to generations that follow. The saints, too, are persons who lived in history and, though of past ages, belong to every new generation and are ever-abiding in the Church with us.

Not only does an Icon proclaim the historical reality of Christ as God-Man and of His saints, but it expresses the glorification of the human nature of Christ and the sanctification and heavenly exaltation of the personality of the saints who have been rewarded by God with celestial blessedness.

Consequently, Orthodox Byzantine art does not reproduce their physical appearance in natural realism, but rather seeks to express the spiritual qualities of the figures depicted in an Icon. The iconographer (painter of Icons) does not aim to reproduce Christ and the saints in their physical reality. His intention is to express their spiritual beauty—not their physical attractiveness. The holy Icon should arouse feelings of reverence and ought to uplift the worshipper, as he beholds it prayerfully. The Icon is a symbol—not a decoration. It does not refer to itself, but to the spiritual excellence of the figure depicted. When we kiss an Icon, we are adoring Christ and reverencing the Saint. The adoration or reverence passes from the Icon to the reality of which it is the image.

In Orthodox Byzantine art the expression of the physical is restricted in order that the spiritual might be enhanced. Oftentimes there is an intentional distortion of the members of the body and generally of the physical features. This is not an end in itself, but a means employed to bring out the spiritual distinction of the figure. The pose of the body is occasionally unnatural. There is no mobility. The figure is static as if beholding the vision of God. A glow of divine beauty can be detected on the face, which is usually thin and ascetic in appearance.

The Orthodox Icon seeks to turn our thoughts heavenward. It appeals to the soul—not to the eyes of the body. Thus it is not beautiful in terms of natural realism. It is designed to depict a spiritual expression of serene sublimity. The Orthodox beholder responds to the quality of holiness and not to the external beauty. This is primarily the reason for which statues of Christ and of the saints

are never used in Orthodox Churches. An Icon brings out the soul and not the body of the figure.

Typical of Orthodox art is also the custom of portraying a figure clothed with excessive garments and with the minimum of the exposure of the body and its members. This is true particularly of the Blessed Virgin and other woman saints. The purpose of our Church art is not to represent the perfection of the body, but to reproduce the spiritually sublime and proportionate. "Mystic-aspiring idealism is the chief end of the Icon, not material realism."

It is not always easy to respond positively to Orthodox iconography. One needs to grow in the appreciation of Orthodox art. But it does not come only with instruction. Prayerful effort is required to sense inwardly the holiness of Christ and of the saints in an Icon. It takes time and earnest effort. The more often you gaze at an Icon as you pray, the more you grow in the understanding of the excellence of Byzantine art.

What is important is the fact that we must recognize that Byzantine art is the standard art of our own Church. We have no choice either to accept or to reject it. It is part of our sacred heritage and as we study and concentrate upon this art form, we shall learn to appreciate it and to profit from the use of Byzantine Icons. We can benefit both ourselves and others by accepting to be taught the meaning of Byzantine art and its devotional value.

Non-Orthodox scholars and archaeologists have only in recent decades discovered the genius and distinction of Byzantine art in the Churches which remain from the ancient Christian past. It has been acclaimed as one of the most valuable discoveries in the tradition of the Orthodox Church and a marvelous token of the spiritual grandeur of Byzantine Civilization which Orthodoxy has inherited. This is an inheritance of which we must be proud. It is part of the spiritual treasures which have come down to us from our Orthodox past.

If non-Orthodox are beginning to admire and extol the beauty of Byzantine art, then we, who are Orthodox, have every reason to cherish it, preserve it, and use it as a means of spiritual elevation and of expressing our Orthodox piety.

Although an Icon does not serve simply a decorative purpose, yet it helps to create an atmosphere in the Church proper to prayer and worship. This explains the age-long custom of covering the walls and ceilings with murals depicting scenes from the life of Christ, Biblical events, and figures of the saints. Thus the eye is exposed constantly to what is sacred and the mind can not help but be reminded of the holy. The Church truly becomes a heavenly abode, so to speak, and upon entering the Temple of worship one leaves a secular sphere of mundane surroundings and steps into an image of the celestial world. The vision is sanctified and the Icon becomes a visual aid for being stimulated spiritually.

To keep the walls and ceilings blank and empty of Icons in the cause supposedly of simplicity is a breach of a meaningful Orthodox tradition which is committed at a spiritual and devotional cost. Westernizing our Icons indicates either ignorance of Byzantine iconography or careless indifference. Introducing natural realism is done supposedly in the name of meeting the needs of a contemporary Church. Changing ourselves, however, should be preferred to changing such a priceless heritage of the Church. We cannot change or even develop what has not been understood and applied in the Church. How can we expect to contribute to the growth of Byzantine art when we do not first comprehend it and exemplify it? The Church has only recently re-discovered Byzantine art as belonging to her own cherished tradition.

The spiritualized art of the Orthodox Church can serve as a valuable antidote to the rampant materialism of our nuclear age. It is a useful way of counteracting the inroads which the materialistic frame of mind tries sometimes to make into the life of the Church.

Every good Orthodox Christian keeps Icons in the rooms of his home. It is a good practice to have an Icon hanging on the wall over the bed especially of the children in the home. Parents should make it a point to provide them with an Icon of their patron saint and should train them in the practice of lighting a vigil lamp and burning incense in front of the Icon. The Icon of the Last Supper should be in every dining room. Every home should have at least the Icon of Christ and one of the Blessed Virgin. In some cases all the Icons are collected together in a home shrine in front of which

burns a vigil light. This is a very sacred custom, but it should be put in a conspicuous place and not in a closet or in some hidden corner where it is rarely viewed.

It is also spiritually beneficial, however, to have at least one Icon in every room, including the living room. The Icons will remind us of the ever-abiding presence and watchful eyes of God and will make us mindful of prayer. How vain and worldly of certain households that display secular paintings and tableaux (sometimes of nude figures) on the walls of the rooms without any Icon or religious sign! What you find on the walls of a home can only disclose the kind of people that live in that home.

Icons made in oils on wood are, strictly speaking, the best for devotional use and spiritual benefit. They are more expensive and more difficult to find, but a good Orthodox spares neither effort nor money to secure what is an indispensable part of the furnishings of the home. The old Icons that date back centuries and which are famed as miracle-working Icons are in oil paint and wood. Such an Icon used in the home need not be covered with glass when framed. It is best for the lips to touch the Icon directly instead of the glass in the act of veneration. The older an Icon is the more sacred and valuable it becomes. New Icons are customarily taken to Church and kept in the Sanctuary for a period of forty days to be blessed. It is not enough to make the sign of the Cross and bow in front of an Icon, especially upon entering a Church; a good Orthodox always kisses an Icon which he approaches or to which he is standing close. Icons must be venerated with faith and piety. Any possible indifference or irreverence passes to the very figure of which it is the image.

The Place of Hellenism in Orthodoxy

All Christian Churches are indebted to the contribution which Hellenism has made to the growth and development of Christianity. But the Orthodox Catholic Church claims a special relationship with Hellenism. Indeed Orthodoxy and Hellenism are very closely related and interwoven.

The ancient Fathers of the Church teach that Greek philosophy, like the Jewish religion, played an important part in preparing the world for the coming of Christ. Hellenism was just as much a forerunner of the Christian Gospel as Judaism. Greek thought prepared the human intellect to accept Christ as the answer to the philosophical quest in the way Christ fulfilled the religious longing of man which was typified by Judaism. For example, St. Clement of Alexandria states: "Greek philosophy prepares the way for the truly royal teaching; training in some way or other, and moulding the character, and fitting him who believes in Providence for the reception of truth. Philosophy was given to the Greeks directly and primarily, till the Lord should call the Greeks. For this was a tutor to bring the Greek mind, as the Law, the Jews, to Christ. Philosophy, therefore, was a preparation, paving the way for him who is perfected in Christ."

St. Justin Martyr of the third century also says: "We have declared that Christ is the Logos of whom every race of men were partakers and those who lived in conformity to reason are Christians, even though they have been thought atheists, as among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus, and men like them."

The Holy Fathers, who themselves were distinguished for their Greek erudition, believed that Hellenism found its fulfillment in Christ, Who is the eternal Logos about Whom the Greek philosophers speculated. Apart from being the perfect vicarious offering for man's atonement, Christ is the absolute Principle of the universe, relating God to man and to the cosmos, and the Principle of knowledge in the cognitive and epistemological sense.

Not only was Hellenism regarded as being fulfilled, but it was actually continued as an instrument of expressing the inefable mystery of the Godhead and of the Divine Dispensation. The divinely-inspired Scriptures of the New Testament were written in the Greek language and indeed all Christian literature that followed thereafter. Greek thought patterns and categories were used throughout the age of the Ecumenical Councils to define the correctness of the Faith. The golden age of the fourth century marked the climax of the merger between Hellenism and the Gospel. The Greek spirit was baptized into the Christian Faith and made to serve the needs of the

Church. It gave creativity, freedom, and breadth to Christian theology, which later in the West became static and authoritarian after its stage of Latinization.

Constantinople (New Rome) inherited both Athens and Jerusalem. The Greek frame of reference and the Gospel combined to constitute the foundation of the new Christian Greek Civilization which was the accomplishment of the Byzantine Empire. Emperor Justinian ordered the closing of the Platonic Academy of Athens in 620 to proclaim solemnly and with finality, as it were, that since Hellenism was embraced by the Church as her own, it belonged inside, not outside, the Church where it could be kept subordinated to the Gospel. He finished what the Fathers of the Church began. He claimed Hellenism for the Church and affirmed that it has no right or purpose to exist independently any longer. No rival philosophy or religion had part in the newly emerging Christian Graeco-Roman Society which acknowledged Christ as the absolute and eternal Truth in all aspects of human life.

The early history of Orthodoxy is the account of the emergence of Christian Hellenism. The Gospel and Hellenism combined in a synthesis that has remained indissolubly connected with the Church. This combination has enabled Orthodox Christianity to respond to the intellectual demands of the human spirit. Christian Hellenism has remained the point of departure in every approach to the question of Christian philosophy. It established the harmony between faith and reason within Orthodoxy which provided ultimate contentment to the human mind. It made possible the relating of Christ to every aspect of human existence.

As Father Georges Florovsky, the eminent Russian theologian, states: "Hellenism is a permanent category of Christian existence." Any investigation of the philosophy of religion must begin with the Greek Fathers and develop into an evolved form of the principles inherent in their Christian Hellenism. If the West had not lost this synthesis of the early Church, there would have been no Renaissance, nor Reformation, nor Enlightenment, all of which disrupted the unity of Western Christianity and Western Europe. These cultural upheavals represented abortive attempts to regain what had been lost and a profound discontent of the human spirit with Latin Christianity and the authoritarian Church of Rome.

Re-evaluating Hellenism

"Hellenism" is not to be construed in a narrow ethnic sense of the word. It denotes the broad intellectual and cultural framework of Orthodox thought—not allegiance to a national cause. The decline and fall of Byzantium coincides with the changing of Hellenism into a national idea and the loss of the spirit of universality and inclusiveness which was the legacy of the Roman Imperium. The Greek Hellenized the non-Greek more effectively by the all-pervading tolerance and all-embracing inclusiveness which existed within the empire. He Hellenized the barbarian by making him first and foremost a member of the Catholic Church. Once an Orthodox Christian, he invariably underwent Hellenization without the word "Hellenic" being even mentioned, since it was synonymous with "pagan." As late as the 15th century the Ecumenical Patriarch Gennadius Scholarius could say: "Although I am an Hellene by language, I shall never say I am an Hellene, because I do not think as the Hellenes [the pagans]; on the contrary, I want to be called according to my faith and if anyone asks who I am, I shall respond that I am a Christian."

The Greek element was so totally absorbed by the Church that it was superfluous to speak of the Church as the "Greek Church." It was not regarded as a mark of the Church, but simply the normal part of her heritage which did not require a special predication "Greek" any more than the Judaism within the Church necessitated her being called "Jewish" or "Hebrew."

Regardless of national origin, every Orthodox Christian shares in the Greek heritage which is an integral ingredient of Orthodox thought. Regardless of the spoken language, every Orthodox has a part in this Greek legacy. Some Orthodox are Greek by blood and others are Greek by adoption, just as some may be Jewish by blood and others by adoption, as members of the New Israel which is the Church. Hellenism is a question "not of blood, but of thought." To be a Greek implies not a special racial descent necessarily, but primarily a certain spirit or bent of mind. In ancient times Isocrates had said: "All those who share in our culture are called Greeks." If this held true with regard to ancient pagan Hellenism, how much

more does it hold true for Christian Hellenism. Since Orthodox Christianity is the culture par excellence of modern Greece, all Orthodox in a sense are Greeks.

Orthodoxy is the natural heir of both Greece and Israel. Hellenism need not be contrasted to what is Russian, Ukrainian, Serbian, Rumanian, Bulgarian, Albanian, Syrian, Finnish, etc. Such a contradistinction is totally untenable and wholly unacceptable, as we have pointed out. As a common heritage of all Orthodox it must be cherished and respected by all Orthodox equally in its broad cultural connotation. Especially those Orthodox who are Greek by blood are duty-bound to understand and interpret Hellenism in its inclusive and spiritual sense. They only discredit the idea of "Hellenism" when they narrow it down to a single nationality in a chauvinistic sense. A disservice is done to Hellenism within Orthodoxy when we make it appear as if it were a sentiment and cause of a minority loyalty within the Church. Hellenism becomes unpopular and resented when it becomes the reason for exclusiveness and a feeling of superiority. The Greek by blood is obliged to look at his "non-Greek" brother in Christ with the love, affection, and humility that can prove the spiritual and moral loftiness of historical Hellenism. It is with such qualities that he can affirm and make good his claim to leadership, not with pride, arrogance, and chauvinistic exclusiveness. Above all, he must make the effort to demonstrate that Hellenism is a bit more than the combination of Greek cooking, Greek dancing, and Greek flag waving, as wonderful as these are in themselves.

On the other hand, the Slav student of Orthodox theology will do himself and his Church an injustice and an equal disservice, were he to permit himself to neglect the serious study of classical Greek philosophy, language, and Patristic Greek. If Protestant and Roman theologians are well-versed in Greek, how much more incumbent it is for all Orthodox theologians to be at home in Greek studies. If Roman theologians and clergy of differing nationalities communicate with each other in Latin, which is confessedly inferior to Greek in its classical and ecclesiastical recognition in history, how much more imperative it is for all Orthodox theologians and higher clergy to be familiar with classical and spoken Greek, which remains a living and not a dead language, and which unquestionably claims

the qualifications for serving as the universal language of communication within Orthodoxy. The shortcomings of the modern Greeks can be transcended by the Slav Orthodox with the help of an enlightened intellect and deeper Christian humility.

The Ecumenical Movement

The Ecumenical Movement is a world-wide endeavor of Christians to find the unity which Christ intended His followers to have. The plurality of Churches and division in the ranks of Christian believers have weakened the witness of Christ in a confused world that needs Him today more than ever before. A resultant uneasiness has given impetus to ecumenical deliberations which are bringing the Churches closer together.

Since the Orthodox Church grew and flourished within an homogeneous civilization, in which all cultural constituents both religious and intellectual are organically related, it is only natural for her to be disturbed at the Christian disunity and heterogeneity to which the providence of God has now exposed her for the first time in her history. She has actively participated in the work of the World Council of Churches, not because she too is in search of a lost unity, but rather because she possesses that unity which those outside the Church seek to find. The Orthodox Church shares in this inter-Church enterprise with the purpose of discovering what her mission is among the non-Orthodox. In obedience to the Lord and Savior to Whom she submits, the Orthodox Church is prepared to discharge her new responsibility of bearing witness to the unity which past ages have bequeathed to her in an unbroken continuity.

The Orthodox Church teaches that the essential unity of the Church was never lost. There has always been a united Church, although the Protestants maintain consistently that there never has been a one, undivided Church. The word "ecumenical," which is in common use in the present venture for unity, was used way back at a time when there was one Church within the bounds of the

"ecumene," which denoted the one world empire and one civilization of Byzantium. It was used to signify the reality of religious and cultural unity and not merely an effort of church fragments to attain unity. There was an Ecumenical Church in history to which Orthodox witness points. The Ecumenical Patriarchate has survived to this day to remind Protestantism and Roman Catholicism that the Ecumenical Church still exists, namely, the one, catholic, and apostolic Orthodox Church.

The avowed purpose of the Orthodox Church in sharing in the World Council of Churches is to testify to the Faith of Christ which she has preserved unadulterated and free from man-made doctrines. Orthodoxy is self-sufficient in this respect. She welcomes relations with other churches only as an opportunity to reveal to them the message of a Faith which remains free from human perversion.

On the other hand, the Orthodox are becoming aware of the urgency of preparedness and the recognition of her manifest destiny in the western Christian world. A valuable occasion is given us for pondering and examining our own deposit of faith and worship. We cannot begin to make good our claims to being the true Church without first recognizing our spiritual and moral shortcomings, as human members of the Orthodox Church. The only way to perfect our witness is by improving our lives and practicing what we profess.

Our participation in the Ecumenical Movement gives us a splendid opportunity to pause and pass judgment on our own selves. Of course, the Church as the Body of Christ, is always holy and unerring, but those who are members have need of constant self-examination. Self-righteousness can only damage our contribution to the Ecumenical Movement. The fact that we are in the true Church of Christ ought to lead us often into self-criticism. Our responsibility in the sight of God is graver than that devolving upon non-Orthodox, because if we keep the light under the bushel, we shall be far more guilty than those dwelling in doctrinal error. The Lord warns those who have been blessed with more knowledge of His Divine will: "And that servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever

much is given, of him shall be much required, and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more."

Orthodox Response to Ecumenism

The invitation to be part of the Ecumenical Movement is a call to awaken to the new era opening for Orthodoxy. Whether we continue to share in this antinomical venture for Christian unity or not, the fact remains that the hand of God has moved Orthodoxy into the western world to bear witness to a Church too long forgotten and unknown. The crisis plaguing the West is basically one arising from disunity and chaos in all spheres of human existence. The heterogeneous fabric of Western Society resulting from undisciplined thinking stemming from the age of the so-called Enlightenment is disclosing its intrinsic weakness in our times in increasingly tragic terms. It is spiritually bankrupt and Western Christianity has proved impotent to heal the spiritual infirmity which lies at the basis of the crisis of Western Society, simply because it is a Christianity suffering itself from disunity.

The message of Orthodoxy to a world torn by division and cultural disunity is one of unity, religious, intellectual, and cultural. The contribution which the Orthodox Church can make to the Western world in terms of unity is of inestimable importance, providing those who have the privilege of abiding within her bosom believe this and labor to this end with enthusiasm and dedication. This makes it ever more imperative that unity be a conspicuous characteristic of the Orthodox Church itself. By this is meant that unity in fellowship (*koinonia*) as well as in the Faith must be a realized fact, if Orthodoxy is to have any purpose for existing at all. Orthodoxy is the depository of the fulness of Truth and unity which the Holy Spirit gives to the Church; thus, unity must be the unmistakable sign of the plenitude of the Holy Spirit. We cannot possess the Truth to serve selfish interests. The Truth which is Christ manifests itself in the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Love and unity, once made manifest within the Church, become a power that exerts influ-

ence upon the world to which she is exposed and to which she must minister by reason of her God-given mission.

As Orthodoxy moves westward and continues to grow there, we must remember that it bears the residuum of the authentic European Civilization which preserved its political framework until the fall of Constantinople in 1453. The residuary cultural tradition latent in Orthodoxy could be a most valuable contribution to the culturally infirm civilization of the West. We cannot strip Orthodoxy of its cultural involvement without doing violence to its integrity and uniqueness.

It is not making the Orthodox Church conform to the types of Western Christianity that will secure her appeal and ultimate growth in America and generally in the western world. Rather it is the blossoming of her intrinsic ethos kept pure and unchanged that will insure her beneficial effect and prove her inner power. Such fruition of the potential of Orthodoxy will become manifest in the unifying power generated by the Holy Spirit in all areas of human experience, as we find attested to in the age-long history of the Byzantine Society of the Eastern Roman Empire.

In the course of the Church's history the Orthodox Tradition has always moved in company with the rival traditions of would-be prophets and teachers. Along with the historical Orthodox Catholic Church, there were the severed limbs that claimed to be legitimate churches. What some today call Christian disunity was actually convincing evidence of the durability of Christian unity in the face of divisive forces.

The practice of severing from the body of the Church members that have lapsed either morally or doctrinally very naturally gave rise to rival churches. But the existence of heretical and schismatical groups outside the Church was reasonable assurance of her effort to preserve the purity and unity within the Church. Even as the Ecumenical Movement advances forward and achieves the mergers of certain separated churches, separations will continue to emerge, as a simultaneous process. What some might call Christian disunity in history is rather the result of the united Church's endeavor to safeguard her unity. As some unite by entering the Church, others will be separated. Separation is a normal and healthy phenomenon, unless

we are to believe that unity can be achieved at the expense of spiritual and doctrinal purity.

The co-existence of rival churches along with the one Church can be a re-assuring fact. Any healthy organism casts off whatever is foreign and extrinsic for its own protection and survival. Christian disunity should not be confused with the natural consequence of the vitality of the Church. The Church creates and maintains separation whenever the interests of doctrinal purity and unity compel. Thus, separation and disunity in this sense can be a virtue, not an evil.

Orthodoxy Related to Culture

From the Orthodox point of view historical continuity is important in a cultural dimension, as well as in terms of the life of the Church. The Orthodox Church even after the fall of Constantinople to the Turks remained conscious of her age-long association with the Roman Empire since St. Constantine became the first Christian Emperor. Although the Church of Christ can never be of this world in her ultimate nature, yet she cannot refuse the commitment of the state to her divine purpose. The Church accepted the loyalty of the state in the fourth century as a triumph of Christ over an institution that had been committed, until then, to the gods of paganism.

In ancient times it was normal for the state to be indissolubly tied to the religion of the people. The separation of state and religion is a novel phenomenon in human history. It is the result and the same time the cause of the secularization of human society. When Imperial Rome parted company with the pagan gods under Constantine and especially under Theodosius, she espoused the religion of the Gospel. It was inconceivable for the state to divorce itself from religion as a social and ethnic institution.

Unbroken historical continuity, which is essential in the life of the Orthodox Church, is also characteristic of the civilization with which she had developed and flourished. It was not only the Eastern Church that preserved her identity, as an historical continuum. "It

was the Eastern half of the Roman Empire which survived without any break in its history," states one of our modern Byzantine historians. The concept of historical continuity is fundamental both in the civilization of the world in which the Church existed, as well as in the life of the Church. "There is a break in the development of Western Europe which has no parallel in the Eastern Empire."

Christian Greek Culture, as well as the Church, is a historical continuum from the Orthodox standpoint. Progress, in its true sense, and wisdom become a reality only when generations succeed one another in an accumulative and creative process. Such progress and succession is uniquely evident in Byzantine history. "The empire centered on Byzantium was the direct continuation of the Roman Empire in fact and name." The Orthodox Church retains in her memory that "the Byzantine Empire was the only state in the world where the transition from the ancient to the medieval way of life was achieved smoothly without upheavals, by slow and steady evolution."

We cannot regard the Orthodox Church's cultural attachments of the past as something fortuitous and irrelevant to the present. Byzantium, the Christianized Roman Imperium, can never be thought of in separation from Orthodoxy. It was the Orthodox Church that provided the vital stamina which kept the empire alive for one thousand years. It was the Orthodox Faith that gave the Roman world a reason to continue to exist. It was the Church which supplied the empire with a manifest destiny. The Orthodox Church "remained the most civilized religious organization that the world had so far known."

When it is said that Orthodoxy is the Church of Byzantium, it is not meant that her universality is limited. She has been the Catholic and universal Church which Christ has ordained to embrace the whole of the world. Her Byzantine heritage is proof itself of her catholicity. The empire represented the "ecumene" or world in its inclusive sense. It was the Religion for the entire, existing civilized world. The Orthodox even today are conscious of the ecumenical mission of their Church. If it is true that the "Byzantines were always conscious of their past, and their thought was tempered by this awareness of historical continuity," then it must be remembered that

the Orthodox, as heirs of Byzantium, continue to have a profound consciousness of their cultural involvements in the present age.

Cultural Relevance of Orthodoxy

If Byzantium "was the greatest, most active and most enduring political organism that the world has yet seen, giving for centuries that opportunity for living which we associate with the spacious, but transitory peace of Augustus or Hadrian," then the Orthodox Church's possible contribution to cultural stability and orientation is obvious. Her very cultural attachments have been justified. It is to the credit of Orthodoxy that Byzantium, as a western historian can admit, "presents the longest tale of Empire that Christendom has yet seen."

Thus Orthodoxy is not simply another Church among Churches. The Orthodox Church is the heir and guardian of the Orthodox Christian Society. She has inherited a cultural legacy rooted in the Graeco-Roman Civilization. This makes Orthodoxy the creator and fashioner of the authentic European civilization. But it is the Europe, not of Western Society, but of the Orthodox Christian Society, which is the true inheritor of the Greece and Rome which fused with the Gospel in Byzantium.

Orthodoxy stands as the remaining embodiment of the age-long Byzantine or Orthodox Christian Civilization. The Orthodox Church remains the final heir of what history has carried down in cultural terms from Graeco-Roman Civilization. She is rich with cultural experience and always strives to find cultural relationships. Her inherent traditions are not only of a purely religious nature in the narrow sense, but of an intellectual and political nature, too. Byzantium represents not only the past of Orthodox culture, but provides guiding ideas for a new Orthodox Christian culture. It is unfortunate that even Greece has nearly forgotten this fact, although she can be pointed out as the only nation with a direct continuity with the long-extinct Byzantine Empire. It is a regrettable fact that she has become intoxicated by drinking deeply from the springs of West-

ern thought, although the opportunity was there to exemplify at its best the model of Orthodox Christian Civilization.

We can only conjecture what meaning the cultural implications of the Orthodox Church hold for us who live in Western Society. The cultural aspects of Orthodoxy, however, should be taken seriously. We should draw all the inferences logically inherent in them and develop a philosophy of culture at least in theory until the day it becomes actualized in the life of this nation. This need not be taken as a fanciful idea, since the world needs today more than ever before a cultural Christianity. If we are to be true to Orthodoxy, we must carry on the cultural association and categories it embodies and strive for their realization, however distant and remote that end might seem.

Here is where the contribution of Orthodoxy can be made. Western Society, which carries the burden of a disillusioned world today, is culturally bankrupt. Perhaps it is time for Eastern Christianity to perform its cultural destiny again in the world. As the backbone of the Byzantine Empire, it once saved the civilized world from being destroyed by the onslaughts of the Persians and Arabs. "It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the civilization of Western Europe is a byproduct of the Byzantines' will to survive." Again the West is threatened and her very survival is questionable. This time it is a spiritual crisis. The West must be saved from itself. Orthodoxy, which has had no association with the course of Western history, can be the answer to the problem of religious, intellectual, and political harmony of which our confused Western world is in dire need. It is revealing that a non-Orthodox scholar, like Dr. John Thatcher of the Dumbarton Oaks Center of Byzantine Studies, can say that "there is in Orthodoxy an enormous potential, which, when it bursts into its full glory again, will be one of the most magnificent forces for good existing in the world. . . . The Ecumenical Orthodox Church is a living organism and it has a great potential for good that the world needs."



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